

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1801.—VOL. LXX.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 6, 1897.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"I DO NOT ASK YOU TO LEAVE YOUR HOME, ONLY LOVE ME," SAID HOWLAND LESLIE.

HER BETTER SELF.

[A NOVELETTE]

CHAPTER I.

ROCK MOUNT was an old-fashioned dwelling place, situated amid timbered hills and well-wooded slopes, and immediately surrounded by an overgrown quaint garden, at the bottom of which flowed the Doll River, a turbulent quick-rushing stream, which occasionally, at times of high flood, rose and overflowed part of the garden, doing considerable damage to the plants, vegetables, and flowers. Fortunately this was not of frequent occurrence; and though strangers looked upon it as rather unpleasant, not one of the family did, unless it was Mrs. Travers, who, being somewhat of a disappointed woman, seized upon every opportunity with avidity to grumble at

what she termed her hard lot, and make the lives of her near relatives as thorny and uncomfortable as she possibly could.

Mr. Travers and his children, Willie and Annette, regarded the floods with praiseworthy equanimity, and declared that the shrubs looked greener, and the fruit grew more luxuriantly after them. To this the mistress of Rock Mount would never agree, and declared that altogether it was a wretched place, hardly fit for human habitation, and only paupers would live there. This was a sweeping assertion and not strictly true, for though the house was not very commodious or of imposing appearance, nevertheless there was an air of solid, old-fashioned respectability about it, and it was picturesque enough to please people whose ideas were not warped by fruitless dreams of ambition and bitter reverses.

The back of the house looked on to the rocky hill, from which it derived its name, and which sheltered it from the keen northern blasts. It was built of grey lichen-tinted stone, with many-paned windows, a heavy oaken door and a pro-

jecting porch, which was covered in spring and summer with wreaths of pink and white may and clusters of perfuming roses. A gravelled walk led down to a miniature lake, where the great glistening leaves of the water-plants were floating on the surface, sheltering the gold and silver fish and the fat carp when the sunrays became too fierce, and all around was a bewildering mass of sweet-smelling early bloom. A rustic Paradise some folks would have dubbed it, but not so Letitia Travers, as she stood in the oaken porch, a gloomy frown on her still handsome, though somewhat faded face, and discontented look in her blue eyes, which in youth must have been a serious drawback to her claim to good looks, owing to the hardness and want of expression, which counterbalanced her small, regular features and delicate complexion.

"A hovel, with a wilderness round it!" she muttered, bitterly, gazing at the lower part of her domain, which showed signs of a recent irruption of the babbling, turbulent river, which had broken down the bushes and swept away the

earth. "Was there ever such a miserable place!"

"A great many considerably worse, mother," said a young man, who came out and stood beside her, with a gay laugh.

"I mean for people of our birth and position," she rejoined, with an immense assumption of dignity.

"And so do I," he returned.

"We ought to be living, if we had our rights, in a modern country mansion, with all the little elegances of life around us."

"And what are our rights?" demanded her son, quizzically.

"The rights of blue blood," she answered, proudly.

"Blue blood is of no use, mother, nor blood so thick that it won't circulate through one's veins unless there is money to back it, and our pockets are singularly empty." He tapped his significantly as he spoke.

"I know it," snapped Mrs. Travers, quickly, "and they are never likely to be full from any help we get from our children."

"You want so much, mother," he expostulated.

"And you do so little," she retorted.

"What can I do?" he queried, a shade on his bright face; for though he idled somewhat in the few months, helping his father with the garden, the cow and the chickens, he worked hard with his pencil in the winter designing Christmas cards, etching on fans, painting on satin, and doing many things of that kind, which brought gait to the well-nigh empty mill.

"Work harder!" she snapped again. "Then you might be able to give me some of the luxuries and comforts I languish for."

"I hardly think I should be able to do that. I was not brought up in a way that was conducive to money-making."

"I know that. Your father spoiled you, and meant to spoil you more by putting you in the army."

"You used not to think it would spoil me."

"Possibly not. I am wiser now, and think all male children should be educated in a useful, as well as ornamental way."

"I wonder whether I am ornamental?"

"Besides," she continued, not deigning to notice his frivolous remark, "things are very much changed with us."

"They are, indeed," agreed Willie, with a sigh.

"When your father destined you for the army he was a man of wealth and position, and he would have been able to give you a liberal allowance to supplement your pay."

"Of course!" he agreed again.

"I fully approved of his choice of a profession then, for I did not know," she added, with exceeding bitterness, "that he meant to make a fool of himself, and speculate all his substance away."

"He was not foolish," said the son, gently, "only unfortunate."

"I maintain that he was foolish," declared the wife, determinedly. "Ay, and worse than foolish—culpable."

"Oh, mother!"

"Yes, culpable. A man with a wife and family has no right to put his money into risky ventures."

"He did it for our sakes, hoping to double it," and the young man might have added, "and to give you the numerous luxuries and comforts for which you craved and clamoured so loudly," but he magnanimously refrained.

"And lost all."

"Not quite all."

"What is two hundred a year?"

"It keeps us from starvation."

"Ay," she said, grimly, "in a hole like this."

"I don't think it a bad hole."

"I pity your taste."

"Especially as we get it rent free."

"Would a hotel like that," nodding at the old grey house, "be worth rent?"

"Certainly. Keith would get thirty or forty pounds a year for it with the garden."

"Pooh!"

"He would indeed, and I think it most kind of

him to let us have it for nothing—generous in the extreme."

"He might have been generous to a greater degree while he was about it, and have given us a better place."

"In fact, mother," said the young man, with another quizzical glance at his maternal parent, "you would like Drummond Royal itself!"

"To be sure I should," she acquiesced immediately.

"And ten thousand a year to keep it up?"

"Exactly."

"Well, I hardly think Keith will feel inclined to part with his beautiful home and his income."

"Nor I, unless—"

"Unless what?" asked Willie, as she hesitated.

"Unless something I have thought of comes to pass."

"And what is that?" he demanded, with an uneasy glance at her. Mrs. Travers's plans were not always, strictly speaking, quite to his liking.

"You will know in good time," she returned, composedly. "Are you not going for a walk?" she continued, which was as much as to say that the conference, as far as she was concerned, was at an end.

"Yes."

"Then you had better go, and don't be late for tea," at which speech he whistled for his dog and quickly disappeared in the dim recesses of a neighbouring wood, while the chateaux of Rock Mount paced up and down between the beds of nodding daffodils, primroses, and purple violets, revolving certain schemes in her mind, which, if successful, would reconstitute her in the position from which her husband's unlucky speculations had buried her.

Twenty-three years before, when she, a blooming belle of twenty summers, had married Gordon Travers, then a captain in a line regiment, he was possessed of some two thousand a year, which, though an excellent income in those hard days, proved insufficient for him after his marriage. He left the army, as his fair and exacting spouse grumbled at the frequent change of quarters, and the fatigue of dragging two children about with her from place to place, and settled down in a fashionable part of London, living in great style, and making a dashing show amongst the *beau monde*.

For a time his income bore the strain, and then he found it would be necessary to retrench—a proceeding which Letitia Travers decidedly objected to; and urged on by her grumbling he speculated, hoping to make a fortune, and lost all he possessed save two hundred a year, which was reduced to his wife by their marriage settlement. In the midst of his distress and agony, his nephew, child of his elder brother, who had taken the name of Drummond on having been left a fortune and an estate, came forward and offered him Rock Mount as a residence till he could get something better, or as long as he liked to occupy it, and thither he removed with the scanty remnants of his fortune.

To him the change, though hard, was not so dreadful. He loved the country, he had his children to console him, and he was a man of a singularly placid and amiable disposition.

To her it was horrible, a sort of living death. She liked gaily, the haunts of fashion, the compliments of the idle butterflies that fit about the *beau monde*, and fine clothes, and loathed the dull, uneventful life at Rock Mount.

"For six years I have endured it," she muttered, as she paced up and down; "for six years without break or change, and now I feel that I can bear with the dullness of this place but a little while longer. Annette is seventeen, the time is ripe. She must and shall rescue me from this horrible life. My youth is past, my prime is wasting. I must make haste and escape once more to that world which is congenial to my tastes and feelings. If not soon my good looks will have vanished entirely," and entering the house, she went into the parlour and studied her reflection in the mirror with considerable attention.

She bore her forty-three years remarkably

well. There was not a single grey hair in the frozen braids, nor a single line about the firm mouth or hard eyes.

Her complexion, like that of most very fair women, was slightly faded, but a touch of rouge would, she knew, freshen it up marvellously. Then her figure was as lithe and upright as any girl's of eighteen, and her bust delicately rounded.

In smart gowns, very different from the common black twill she wore, she would still be a very attractive woman, and she meant, to attract in a wider circle than that which her present abode afforded; and primed with this thought she attacked her husband when he came in to tea, as they were alone, Willie not having returned from his walk, and Annette spending the evening with some friends.

"What do you think I found to-day, Gordon?" she commenced, as she handed him his tea, and pushed a dish of eggs towards him.

"I don't know," he rejoined, somewhat listlessly, lifting his head and looking at her.

He was only ten years his wife's senior, but he might have been thirty. His luxurious hair was silvery white, his dark eyes sunken, with heavy lines beneath, and his skin of a peculiar, almost unearthly pallor, under all the sun-tan, while on his lips was the saddest of sad expressions, reflected in the sunken eyes with mournful intensity. If she loudly bewailed their misfortune, it was plainly evident that he silently did likewise, and that the blow had struck home.

"Well, guess, can't you?"

"I am not good at guessing. Tell me, my dear."

"A description of The Royal when old Sinclair Drummond wanted to sell it and put it in the papers."

"Ah! It was a good thing for his son that he died before he could carry out his plan."

"Yes, indeed, and for Keith, or he wouldn't be master there now."

"And for us," murmured Gordon Travers.

"Just listen how grand it sounds," and she read out in her clear, musical tones, "The fine country seat known as Drummond Royal, handsomely furnished, to be sold in the centre of the Doil Hunt, containing magnificent entrance hall, with gallery, spacious drawing, dining and morning rooms, billiard and smoking rooms, splendidly appointed library, private chapel with organ, twenty bed and dressing rooms, commodious domestic offices, extensive orchards, and kitchen garden, vineries, peach-house, conservatories, mushroom house, mason pits, fine stables, coach-house and kennels, several cottages and ten acres of meadow land, right over a grouse-moor, and 2,000 acres mixed shooting, preserved fishing for five miles, rabbit warren, good country society, three miles from station, &c. What a place to possess. Happy man he that possesses it."

"Yes, he ought to be."

"What do you mean by 'ought to be'?" she queried, casting a quick glance at her husband.

"Well, he isn't, you know."

"Then he ought to be. Ten thousand a year and that place is enough for earthly happiness."

"Money isn't everything, my love."

"It is a good deal in this world."

"True. Still there are some things it can't purchase. Health, for instance."

"Keith doesn't want that. He is strong enough."

"Then happiness. He is not perfectly happy."

"Do you mean to tell me that at thirty-seven he is still regretting the woman who jilted him when he was twenty-two?"

"Yes."

"Then he isn't the wise man who I took him to be."

"Possibly not. Some men don't easily get over the breakdown of their first love affair."

"He has plenty to console him for the lost love of a worthless woman, for she must have been worthless to jilt a man who was heir to such a place," added Mrs. Travers, sapiently.

"Do you think so?" Mr. Travers glanced at her curiously as he spoke.

"I do. But it seems to me that he has been more lively of late."



"Yes. I think he likes being able to come in here at any time and have a chat."

"Yes, so do I."

"He is fond of his relatives, and doesn't care for strangers."

"There is one of his relatives for whom I wish he would develop any amount of love."

"Which one do you mean?" queried her husband, with a pained look.

"Annette!"

"Yes. Your daughter. It would be a fine thing for her to be mistress of Drummond Royal."

"That child!"

"That child was seventeen last month. Quite a marriageable age."

"But—but—they are first cousins!"

"But no no buts. What of that? If he proposes to her you surely won't be mad enough to refuse your consent on that score!"

"I don't know. I haven't thought about it," he replied, rising and pushing away his uneaten cup.

"Then you had better think of it, Gordon; for, unless I am very much mistaken, Keith's altered looks are owing to his growing affection for our child."

"You may be mistaken."

"I think not," rejoined his wife, as he left the room.

CHAPTER II.

THE woods around Rock Mount were ringing with the songs of the wild birds. One morning, a week later, as Annette Travers came slowly through them, her hands, and the skirt of her dress, which she held up with difficulty, were full of blue-bells, scarlet arums, homely hyacinths, purple violets, that matched in colour her beautiful eyes, soft sulphur-hued primroses, surrounded by their tender crumpled leaves, golden daffodils, and a heap of other spring blossoms.

Many girls would have hesitated as they lifted a dainty cambric gown to hold the goodly woodland spoil, but not so Annette. Though seventeen summers had passed over her fair head, she was still in most things utterly child-like and simple. Flowers with her were a passion, and she thought nothing of the gown, and everything of being able to carry home enough blossoms to deck every vase and bowl she could find in her home.

So there she was, with her skirts gathered up as a little child might have them, strolling slowly through the budding woods, stopping every now and then to listen to the ringing note of the finch, as it sang its bright challenge, or the soft coo of the wood-pigeon, or the mellow thrill of the blackbird, that came along, leaning murmuringly on the balmy air.

It was twilight there, though ever and anon a shaft of sunlight would pierce the branches, casting chequered patches of brilliance on the mossy carpet, and play upon the girl's brown head, gilding the wavy tresses with a metallic sheen, adding to their natural beauty.

Eagerly she drank in the sights and sounds around her. The delicate green tracery of the opening buds, the bushy-tailed, black-eyed squirrels scampering from tree to tree, the gaudy-plumaged jays flying overhead with their discordant "tehare, tehare," the warm, soft-scented air, the smell of pines, and the heavy perfume of the pink may.

"I could stay here for ever," she murmured, ecstatically. "It is so lovely this morning, but then it should always be spring, and that couldn't be. What a goose I am," and with a rippling laugh she tripped on at a quicker pace, and soon reached the Mount.

"Where is William?" demanded Mrs. Travers—she never condescended to call her son, as others did, "Willie."

"He is with Keith," answered Annette.

"With Keith! Is he coming here? Have you seen him this morning?" she asked quickly, throwing a sharp look at the girl, who, intent on arranging her flowers in a huge bowl, merely said,—

"Yes," without looking up.

"Coming here, you say? and to breakfast!"

"Yes, he said he was coming, and of course I couldn't say don't. It doesn't matter, does it?"

"Matter! Of course not. I always am delighted to see the dear boy (Mrs. Travers invariably called him 'a boy,' and spoke in extravagantly affectionate terms of him to her daughter), and to-day more than ever," which was quite true, for she had been revolving certain schemes in her mind, and was burning to put them into execution. "Fetch the preserves from the pantry. The strawberry, you know, is his favourite, and tell Deana we must have some cream, and a pat of her best butter;" and bustling about with a will she soon had the table looking smart and more plentifully spread, and was ready to welcome Keith Drummond when he came in.

"Hope I'm not in the way, aunt," he said, dutifully stooping to kiss the cheek which she presented to him.

"Not at all, my dear," she returned, in cordial and very different tones from those in which she addressed her own family. "I am sure I need not tell you that you are always most welcome, come when you may, and the oftener you come the better we shall like it."

"Thanks," he murmured gratefully, though he had received the same assurance dozens of times before. "I feel lonely sometimes up at the Royal."

"Of course you do," she agreed urbanely, "more especially at breakfast, which is a meal requiring a woman to preside at it to make it homelike and comfortable."

"Just so," he assented, and unconsciously his eyes travelled to Annette, who, like Welter's "Charlotte," was cutting bread and butter, and seated there.

"Large houses are always dreary," struck in Mr. Travers; "unless inhabited by large families."

"I think they are," and the owner of the large house stopped, looking at the daughter, and looked at the father.

Uncle and nephew were singularly alike. Both tall, broad-shouldered men, with dark eyes, straight, clear-cut features, and heavy drooping moustaches.

The likeness was intensified by the look of melancholy on either face, and it seemed that in a few years, when the dark locks of the younger man became frosted with the snows of time, that he would become the exact counterpart of the older one.

Both had suffered, and through women. One had gained his heart's desire and was wretched—the other had lost it, and was wretched.

Fate had smiled on neither, and life was nearly over with its trials and troubles for Gordon Travers. The future could hold little or nothing good in store for him. It might for Keith Drummond, and so he thought, as he sat and looked at Annette, with the morning sunbeams weaving a golden web amid her soft hair, and lighting up the violet depths of her large eyes.

"Put that round your neck," ordered Mrs. Travers, when breakfast was finished, and Annette prepared to rally out and visit the chicks and the ducklings, and the gold fish and sundry other pets.

"It will make me so hot, mother," she expostulated, eyeing the cambric handkerchief unfavourably.

"Never mind. I wish you to wear it," and not being used to disobey her mother she took and pinned it round her snowy throat.

"I wish that child would not run about in such a wild fashion," bewailed Mrs. Travers, when she was left alone in the quaint old parlour with Keith, preparing to open the campaign.

"Why not?"

"Her hands are dreadfully brown, her neck is beginning to scorch, and her face will be freckled."

"That won't matter, aunt; freckles are a sign of health."

"They don't matter in the country, but it is different in town."

"Annette is not in town."

"Not at present," returned the arch con-

sultor, taking up an elaborate piece of work and stitching at it diligently. "When she does go there it will not do for her to appear with a coarse, red face."

"She would never have that; her skin is too fine."

"She would look coarse among the pale faces of the London belles."

"She may never have to undergo that test."

"She will have the opportunity of undergoing it very soon."

"What do you mean, aunt?" The Master of Drummond Royal lifted his head, and regarded her intently.

"My elater, Mrs. Murray, wrote to me yesterday, asking if I would let Annette go to her, and stay with her for the season."

"And what have you said?" his tone was full of anxiety.

"I have not answered yet," she replied.

"There is the letter"—handing him an epistle which her sister had written at her request.

"She lives in Belgrave, is very pressing, and it would be an immense advantage for my poor child. Lina knows so many nice people."

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Murray lived in a small house in Piccadilly, into which she could not possibly have squeezed another person, as she had a large and ever-increasing family of her own, and her acquaintances lay amongst the shabby-genteel class.

Still she was quite ready to help her sister, and had done so to the best of her ability, having sent a most pressing invitation which she well knew would never be accepted.

"What do you mean to do?" asked Keith again, as he finished perusing the letter and laid it down, with a hand that trembled somewhat, despite his efforts to steady it.

"I—I—hardly know," replied his aunt with affected hesitation, keeping a furtive eye on him as she spoke.

"She ought to go, I feel that. Seventeen—and she has seen no society—had none of the advantages of mixing with the great world. We are so poor, this may be her only chance; ought I to refuse it?" She looked at her companion, but he gave no answer, as went on,—

"She is very lovely, is she not; or am I partial?"

"She is most beautiful," he said with fervour.

"And probably would receive a good proposal. You know she must marry well, for we have nothing to leave the poor child, and I should not rest easy in my grave if I do not leave her in some good man's care."

"You mean—to—send—her—to—your sister's?"

"That rests with you, dear Keith."

"How?" he asked, hoarsely.

"You know our straitened means," she continued glibly. "Can you, will you lend me sufficient to get her a suitable outfit for her *début*, and to launch her on the world of fashion, to take her chances amid town-bred beauties?"

Mrs. Travers not unfrequently borrowed from her nephew, and always forgot to pay him, he liberally responding to her demands, but she was not surprised when he said "No" to this demand.

"You—you—think she ought not to go?" she faltered.

"I do."

"Why?"

"Because I love her," he said, rising and facing the woman who had plotted and planned and longed for this answer, "and because I cannot give that to you which may enable some other man to win what I long for and prize beyond anything else on earth. If you want her to marry well give her to me. I will guard and cherish her as no more stranger could. This affection is the slow growth of the last six years. My life has been a sad one, but now—now I see a chance of such happiness as I have never dreamed of. Give her to me, aunt—give her to me, I beseech you," he implored.

"My dear Keith, you quite take my breath away," she murmured, holding her handkerchief to her face that he might not see the look of triumph that overspread it. "You surely can't mean this?"

"I do most solemnly. If Annette will not become my wife—if you and uncle will not give her to me—no other woman shall reign at Drummond Royal. My home and my heart will be bare and empty. Oh! have you not seen it!" he went on, vehemently. "Have you not seen that this young life mingling with mine has driven away bitter regret and unavailing sorrow, has given me hope and strength and energy, an object in life—something to live for, to dream of—has swept away the blank desolation which another woman's treachery caused?"

"I certainly have noticed that you have appeared to be in better spirits of late," she admitted, with seeming reluctance.

"And now you know the reason of it."

"Are you certain Annette is the reason of it?" asked Mrs. Travers, doubtfully.

She felt she could afford to throw obstacles in the way of such an ardent wooer, and that do what she might her prey was safe, her fish firmly hooked.

"I am certain, positive," he answered, eagerly.

"You may be mistaken," continued the skilful angler. "You may mistake your feelings. She is such a simple, child-like creature. What is there about her to win the love of a man such as yourself?"

"Everything," he answered, enthusiastically. "Youth, beauty, a sweet disposition, a charming manner, a ready sympathy with the sorrows of others. To me she is more charming, far more charming, than the most finished belle could possibly be."

"She is a sweet child," acknowledged the mother, shedding a crocodile tear. "To part with her will be a sad trial."

"Don't call it parting," expostulated the lover. "The Royal is so near here. You can see her every day, and it will be far better than marrying her to one of those London men you were speaking of, whose homes are at a distance."

"True," agreed his companion. "Still I don't know what her father will say. She is his favourite."

"I dread his refusal. But I trust he will not be cruel to me. Should he refuse me now others will come wooing in the future. He cannot hope to keep her with him always."

"True," agreed his aunt again, with a dolorous sigh; "and I think he would rather give her to you than to a stranger."

"I trust so. When shall I consult him? I must have his full permission before I breathe a word of love to Annette."

"Certainly. You have never given her a hint of your feelings, I suppose?"

"Never."

"Well, if Gordon does consent you must be prepared for some shyness and reluctance on her part. She knows nothing of love and lovers."

"So much the better, aunt. I shall not take her first no."

"Nor the second, if you wish to win her."

"I shall have a world of patience if I see the least chance of her yielding to me."

"That is right."

"And about seeing uncle?"

"He is in the study now. You can go and consult him," and Keith waited for no second bidding, but hurried off to the untidy, littered room, where his elderly counterpart sat, surrounded by unpaid bills and account books, looking more worried and sad than usual, for duns were pressing and money scarce.

The proposal came as a sort of shock to Gordon Travers at first, though he was better prepared for it than he would have been by his wife's hints. Still, it seemed to him that Annette was yet a child, and unfitted to take upon her young shoulders the cares and responsibilities of matrimony.

After a while, as he listened to the pleadings of the young man, he began to think that it would be both a desirable and natural match for his daughter. He was deeply attached to his kinsman, whom he knew possessed sterling qualities, and was certain to make a devoted husband, and then his darling would be near him.

He could see her often in her beautiful home; and, though he was far from worldly or avaricious, he was fully alive to the advantages of such

a marriage for a young girl situated as Annette was. Her future had often troubled him. Now she would be amply provided for, and a staunch friend secured to his son by a closer tie than that of mere consanguinity.

Notwithstanding all these advantages, however, he stipulated that Annette's acceptance must come from herself, be of her own free will, and that pressure should not be put on her—to which Keith at once agreed, saying that he wished to win a willing bride, not a reluctant one, and then, armed with his uncle's permission, he went to find Annette and plead his cause.

CHAPTER III.

He had not very far to go. As he stepped from under the projecting porch, he saw her standing by the miniature lake throwing crumbs to the gold fish. She held her large shady hat by its blue ribbons, and the bright sun-rays streamed down on the brown head and faultless skin, showing its flawless smoothness.

He walked slowly down the path, watching her, his mind a-tumult of varied emotions. He had not known, until his aunt spoke of her marrying someone else, how powerful his love for her was. Would his deep devotion win a return? Would she come to him, and be enshrined in his heart—give her precious life into his keeping? All the passion and intensity of a strong nature was roused. He longed to put the question, and yet dreaded the answer.

He was not vain. He had none of that presumptuous hope in which a younger man would have indulged, and he knew Annette to be too guileless and innocent to set store by his great worldly possessions. She would care for him for himself or not at all.

He might woo, as far as she individually was concerned, as a penniless pauper with an equal chance of success as in his rightful character of Master of Drummond Royal.

His fate hung upon a single word—the whole happiness of the rest of his life upon a little "yes." And yet—and yet, if she refused! If his almost insane joy, his great hopes, were disappointed, his future rendered a ruined, broken thing, his maturer days spoiled as his youth had been—by a woman?

Of course there would be a difference. One had accepted him and his heartfelt devotion with smiles and wiles, and soft tender coquetry had led him on to look upon her as the one with whom all his days would be spent; and then, when he had grown accustomed to her—when she had twined herself, as it were, into the very centre of his being—had grown to look to her for every joy, had lifted him twenty-four hours before their wedding-day, running away with a man who had a title tacked on to his name, and a few more thousands at his bankers.

That was not likely to happen again. Annette was above such sordid conduct. Still in her innocence she might deal him a heavy blow, from which he would not easily recover.

"Well, Keith," she said, turning to him as he joined her, "have you finished your chat with dad?"

"Yes."

"And now you can come with me. I am going to the woods. They are so lovely. Come."

"Not now, Annette."

"Why not?"

"I have something serious to say to you."

"Can't you say it there?" she asked, with childlike unconsciousness of the tremor in his voice, the agitation of his manner.

"No; I will say it here," and, taking her hand he drew her into a rustic arbour, the greenery of which concealed them effectually from the gaze of prying eyes.

"Well, what is it?"

This was demanded with the utmost nonchalance. He often consulted her, encouraged thereby by her mother, on little matters connected with his house and domestic arrangements; and she thought that Mrs. Gray, his antediluvian and utterly useless housekeeper, who was a sort of institution at the Royal, and had

been there upwards of sixty years, had made some fresh blunder, necessitating her help and assistance, for she was a clever little woman, and knew a great deal about potting and preserving, pastry-making, and butter-churning, and was just a wee bit proud of her knowledge.

"What is it?" she repeated, as he remained silent.

"I want to ask you a question," he returned, with evident effort.

"Yes."

"Do you like this neighbourhood?" he said next, rather vaguely.

"Very much," she replied, readily.

"Better than London?"

"Oh, yes, a great deal better. I would rather a thousand times be here than there!"

"And do you like Rock Mount?"

"Why, yes; you know I do," this with a glance of astonishment at him.

"Which do you think you would like best, to live here or at Drummond Royal?"

"Always?"

"Yes, always."

"At the Royal. This is a dear old place and I like it, but of course it won't compare with the Royal. The park and the deer there are lovely. Then the pheasants. I do love watching the silver pheasants plume themselves; and the rabbit warren, with all those tiny bunnies, and their funny little bits of tails, and the conservatories. Oh! Keith, I could stay for a month in the orchid house!" and she laid her hand on his arm in her enthusiasm, and he immediately possessed himself of it.

"You can stay there for a year if you like, dear. I want you to come and live at the Royal—to make it your home."

"How kind!" she cried, with sparkling eyes, not understanding his meaning. "And dad and mother?"

"No, only you," he answered, watching her closely.

"But—but—how could—I—come alone," she asked.

"Come as my wife," he whispered, passionately, his lips close to her ear, his hand clasping hers convulsively.

"Oh, Keith!"

One startled look she gave him, and then, as the red blood crept from brow to chin, and spread over the snowy neck, she turned her face away, and covered it with the disengaged hand. Childish, innocent as she was, she could not mistake the passion that glowed in his dark eyes, and made his firm voice tremble. Dawning womanhood sprang to life at his words, which lifted the veil and showed her what lay behind.

"Don't turn from me!" he implored. "Am I distasteful to you? Do you hate me?"

"No," she murmured, almost inaudibly.

"Then—don't you love me?"

"Yes—but—but—not—like that."

"How then?"

"As—as—a cousin—a brother."

"And couldn't you care for me in any other way?"

"I—I don't know."

"Will you try?"

"I couldn't leave mother and dad," she objected, desperately, casting about for an excuse in her shame and distress.

"Why not?"

"What would they say?"

"They wish it."

"Keith!"

"Yes. They know it will be for my happiness, they trust it may be so also for you. Annette, I am lonely; my house is empty and desolate. Will you not take pity on me, and bring the sunshine of your presence to the Royal. Give me something to live for, to hope for!"

He stopped and looked at her. She had turned her face towards him, and was listening to his impassioned pleading. She was temptingly near him. He had a mad desire to clasp the slender figure to his breast and kiss the sweet, trembling lips, but seeing that she shook with agitation he controlled himself by a violent effort.

"I will not press you," he went on gently. "Take time and think over what I have said."

Perhaps I have no right to hope for such happiness as would be mine if you became my wife."

Her lids drooped, and she flushed again at the words.

"I love you better than anything else on earth. Still, if you feel that you cannot love me, and that you never could do so, I must bear it as I best can, and accept the inevitable. Don't let any thought of me influence you. Answer as you please, and do what you think will be best for your own welfare."

He released her hand as he ceased speaking, and murmuring some words about "telling mother," she fled up the path, and disappeared beneath the porchway.

Keith sat for some time in silence, watching the place where he had last seen her; then, with a heavy sigh, he rose, and walked slowly, with lagging steps to his magnificent home. The dogs flew to meet him, baying their welcome; the gorgeous plumed pascok on the terrace waddled towards him; a great Persian cat, snow white from head to tail, rubbed itself against his knees, and a tame canary flew to meet him as he entered his room, and perched on his shoulder; an attentive servant brought him afternoon tea, and the butler appeared with a whole armful of papers, freshly arrived from town, and deposited them on a table near him.

Altogether Keith Drummond ought to have been highly comfortable, and highly well satisfied with himself and his surroundings. Yet he was not. He sighed from time to time as his eyes wandered round the handsome room, replete with every luxury and comfort.

He caressed the massive head of his bloodhound, Duke, absently, as it rested on his knee, and took no notice of Thyra, the tame bird, or Cydis, the cat, while he quite forgot the tea.

He was thinking of his wooing and its unsatisfactory result. She would not have him, he feared. She did not love him as he longed to be loved, and nothing extraneous would influence her. Her youth and timidity, though charming, were against him, he knew.

"I must live my life alone, I suppose," he said, with another sigh and another glance round the room, which somehow or other seemed emptier and less home-like than usual. "It is my fate to be disappointed. Duke, you won't have a mistress, and must put up with only a master. Come, old fellow," he added, a minute later, as though trying to cast aside the gloomy thoughts that held him, "we'll go for a stretch and dissipate the blues," and away he strode, followed by the hound, feeling that action was the only panacea for the pain at his heart.

Meanwhile Annette had seen her mother, who purposely met her in the hall, and, with a meaningful look drew her into the parlour, saying—

"Well, love, you have seen Keith?"

"Yes, mother," was returned, in faltering tones.

"And what answer have you given him, my child?"

"Oh! mother, I told him I could not leave you and dad," burst out the girl, hysterically.

"Ah! poor Keith, and his home so lonely and desolate," murmured Mrs. Travers, in tones of deep commiseration, adding immediately, "there, dear, say no more about it now. Don't distress yourself," and she left her in peace for two days, but after that she led the conversation so that it flowed in such channels that Annette grew to pity her cousin, for whom she had a tender regard, and to feel that in giving him happiness she would secure her own.

Finally, before a week was over she would have been ready to marry him had he been old, ugly, and repulsive, instead of young, handsome, and attractive, so artfully had her mother worked on her romantic feelings; and Keith one evening received a message from his aunt which made him half mad with joy, and hasten with all his speed to Rock Mount, where Annette blushing laid her hand in his, and promised to be his wife, and let him take his first lover's kiss from her soft lips.

CHAPTER IV.

WILLIE was away when the betrothal of his sister was consummated, and returned when the engagement was a fortnight old. He was hardly inside the house when his mother told him the grand news.

"You are joking," he said, for to a youth like him a disparity of twenty years between husband and wife seemed an awful thing—a perfect lifetime. "Indeed I am not," she answered, tartly. "Annette is going to be mistress of Drummond Royal, and Keith's wife!"

"Keith's wife! Why, it's absurd. He is old enough to be her father."

"Young enough to be her husband, you mean."

"Surely the governor won't allow such a sacrifice!"

"Sacrifice, indeed! What are you thinking about? One would imagine Keith was an old horror, instead of a manly gentleman that any woman might be proud to marry."

"Keith is well enough in himself. I know he is a rare good fellow; still he is too old for Annette," he persisted.

"Your father does not think so."

"And what does she think?"

"Ask her, and you will know."

He followed his mother's advice, and found the young girl anything save averse to the match. She was not madly in love with her cousin, yet she was evidently very fond of him, and now that she was getting accustomed to it, regarded the marriage, which was to take place in six months, with complacency, while about Drummond there could be no doubt.

He looked younger, handsomer, better in every way, and Willie, seeing his joy and Annette's content, forbore to say one word that would cast a shadow on their happiness. He felt it would be useless and bootless, and just about that time an element of distraction entered his life.

Mrs. Murray's eldest daughter had been in delicate health, and she begged her sister to give her the benefit of a few weeks' country air. Mrs. Travers, at peace with herself, and all the world, by reason of the successful results of her manoeuvring, readily acceded to this request, and Dora Murray arrived at Rock Mount.

She was a good-looking girl, in a showy, rather coarse style, evidently a tremendous flirt, and though only two years Annette's senior, was well versed in all the ways of the world.

She shocked her cousin sometimes, and astonished her; but, on the whole, they were very good friends. She struck up a great flirtation with Willie, who being in his salad days fancied himself deeply in love, and only gave him up when nobler prey, in the shape of a military friend of Keith's, appeared on the scene.

Rowland Leslie was a particularly handsome man. His eyes were of the bluest blue, his hair really golden, his moustache ditto, his features perfect, his figure superb. There ended the list of his perfections.

He was selfish, callous, unprincipled, reckless. A good enough companion for men, for he was a crack shot, played billiards well, rode gracefully, and could tell an amusing tale with point and piquancy; for women he was decidedly detrimental.

He had nothing beyond his pay save a mass of debts, could whisper soft nothings as though he really meant them, and was not as scrupulous as he might have been.

He had received a slight wound in a recent battle, and made the most of it. Meeting Keith one day in town he told him the doctors had ordered country air, and that he couldn't afford to get it. Keith at once asked him down to the Royal, and the gallant captain availed himself of the invitation with alacrity. He and Miss Murray got on capitally. They had met in town, and renewed the acquaintance *con amore*. He would have much preferred a serious little affair with his friend's fiancée, but she was coy and shy. So he amused himself, for the time, with the Dashing Dora.

"What would mamma say," she laughed one day, as she sat under a great cedar on the lawn at the Royal with Leslie, daintily playing with a

plate of strawberries and cream, and watching the gay throng that Keith had bidden to his old house to celebrate his betrothal, "if she knew I have so much of you, and that sometimes we—we—actually—"

"Flirted," he put in, lazily, as she hesitated. "Well, yes, flirted," she agreed, "indulged in tender—"

"Nothing," he interrupted again, at which interruption his fair companion did not look over well pleased, for though she would not have dreamt for an instant of bestowing her slender hand on such a penniless hero, and fully intended to marry the first old curmudgeon who proposed for her, always providing that his money-bags were heavy enough, still she liked to imagine that this blue-eyed Adonis felt some of the pangs of love—meant a little, only a little, of the nonsense he whispered so softly, and really appreciated her showy good looks. His manner was careless and hardly flattering, and she frowned for an instant.

"Say speeches," she implored, the next moment, with a pretty gesture and a fascinating glance at him.

"I'll say anything you like," returned the captain, nonchalantly. He knew he might safely with Miss Murray, as he was well aware she was looking out for gold. "I'll tell you I adore you and the ground you tread on, but what would 'mamma' say?"

"That I wasn't to waste my time with detriments," she retorted, giving a Roland for his Oliver.

"And she would be right. What is the use of it?"

"There is no use in it. Wrong, but nice you know. Men with money are always nasty."

"Not always."

"Generally."

"And poor ones delightful, eh?"

"Just so," she agreed, coolly.

"I'll prove you wrong for once. Do you see that fine, sunburnt fellow talking to Drummond?"

"Yes," she assented, her eyes following his, and resting on a veritable son of Anak, with crisp, curly, chestnut hair, and honest grey eyes that harmonised well with his ruddy skin.

"Do you think him 'nasty'?"

"No, decidedly 'nice'."

"Well, his income is five thousand a-year."

"Oh! how delightful!"

Her face was radiant.

"And he has a title."

"Better still. Who is he?"

"Sir Humphrey Dawson. Shall I introduce him?"

"Please."

Leslie quickly performed the ceremony, and feeling that two was company three none, she strolled over to where Annette sat, and commenced chatting to her.

Very lovely she looked, in a white, lace-trimmed gown, and a huge hat, loaded with snowy feathers, presents from her intended, given at Mrs. Travers's suggestion, and which formed a fitting frame for the delicate face and bright hair.

"Have you been enjoying yourself?" he inquired, in his most seductive tone.

"Very much," she replied, looking up, a quick blush mantling the soft cheek.

"Playing tennis?"

"Yes."

"Rather too warm for that, I think."

"A little, perhaps."

"A stroll in the woods would be more to my taste."

"And to mine," she said, brightly. "I think they are so lovely now—so dim, and cool, and green."

"This is the month in which they look their best, leafy time."

"Yes. The foliage soon turns once June is over."

"True, and I therefore think we ought to take advantage of the green beauty while it lasts. Do you think we might venture for a little stroll now? You know them so well, it would be doubly delightful to me to see them under your

chaperons. You could point out all the beautiful spots."

"Indeed I could. I know every inch of them."

"Do take me, then," he pleaded, "out of the glare of this pitiless sun, away from the incessant chatter of these magpies, into that cool retreat!"

For a moment the girl hesitated, and looked around for Keith, but he was nowhere to be seen. Intent on his duties as host—duties long strangers to him—he had disappeared among his throng of guests. There was no one to save Annette from the fascinations of Rowland Leslie, and his glances did seem to fascinate her, much after the fashion in which a serpent does a dove.

She rose and accompanied him down the long, dim green aisles, where the rabbits ran fearlessly amid the bracken, and the coo of the pigeon was heard, and the "tap, tap," of the woodpecker, where the air was cool, and bore on its wings the scent of pine and wild flower, and the murmurous hum of busy insect life.

To the last day of her existence the girl never forgot that stroll through the leafy woods.

Her companion strove to exert himself, to dazzle, bewilder, to please, and he succeeded.

His burning, yet half-veiled glances, the smooth, even flow of his melodious voice, his meaning speeches, all had an effect on her.

It showed her "what might have been" was she free. What fair possibilities there were in life for those who were young and unshackled, and beloved and beloved!

Keith adored her, but he was much older than this man, whose blue eyes spoke a language she had never looked for, and therefore, never seen in the honest orbs of her future husband. Then the older man, though more true, noble, and honourable, was not so well versed in women's ways, in silver-tongued flattery, in subtle wiles and fascinations, as the younger.

It might truly be said of Leslie that "His only books were women's looks." He thoroughly understood the fair sex and their little peculiarities and failings, and before he let Annette rejoin the throng of "magpies" he had gained a decided ascendancy over her, had conquered her coy shyness, and won her trust and admiration.

The next few weeks passed like a dream to her. She fought against the fatal fascination, and yet succumbed at the first glance from those secure eyes, which always wore such a tender look when they rested on her; and what wonder, for she loved her.

Victor Hugo says, "Love has no middle term; it either saves or destroys," and it was likely to destroy this man, who had never experienced the feeling before, in all his wild, reckless life.

In all his risky amours and many intrigues he had escaped heart-whole. It was left to an innocent, unsophisticated girl to win the affections of this dashing soldier.

He loved her as well as such a man can—and a bad man can love as well as a good one—sometimes more desperately and fiercely, for they know it is generally hopeless.

His was hopeless and a dishonour to him, and yet he could not shake himself free from the spell her violet eyes cast over him.

He knew he wronged Keith by indulging his passion for his plighted wife, and in cool moments he hated himself, still he did not make the effort a strong man should have done to regain his own honour, and save the girl he worshipped. He was careful not to compromise her in public, not to frighten her in private. Had he spoken openly the bird would have flown away in alarm. He was careful and courteous, and no one guessed the mischief that was going on, least of all Keith.

He was busy superintending the alterations at Drummond Royal—the refurnishing of a suite of rooms for Annette in a most sumptuous style and other matters—and did not notice the alteration in her manner and her bewilderment.

Willie was away. Mr. Travers never noticed anything; his wife, full of projects for the future, when she returned to that gay world for which she longed, and indulged once more in social

triumphs and glories, had no thought to spare for the child who was to buy her these triumphs, and the only one who had a suspicion was Dora Murray.

She, selfishly good-natured, and naturally indifferent, made no remark at the defection of her cavalier. Besides she owed him not a grudge, but a kindness. The horsey, doggie, breezy squire, Sir Humphrey Dawson, had proposed to her, wished to make her mistress of his vast kennels, and of his stables, and of his rickety, broken-down house—for he thought much more of the housing of his horses and dogs than he did of the housing of himself—consequently, despite his five thousand a year, Dawson How was but a rattle-trap, dilapidated place. Still, Dora did not mind that, so accepted him, knowing full well that she could alter and improve many things when she was his wedded wife, and secure of the five thousand.

So engaged and engrossed over her own affairs, she troubled herself not at all about her cousin's, and did not speak that word of warning which might have opened Annette's eyes, and shown her the dangers that lay in her path—the rocks and shoals of which she was too innocent to know anything.

Mrs. Murray's creed, however, was the "live and let live" style, and being anything save innocent herself, and fancying everyone else as knowing as herself and as well acquainted with the ways of the world, she simply thought she was doing a kindness by holding her tongue, and resolutely pretending to be blind to those things which she foolishly fancied she was not by any means wanted to see.

CHAPTER V.

So matters went on through the long, balmy summer days. Keith fond, busy and blind, Leslie made happy in the present and reckless of the future, Annette in a trance-like stupor of bewildered delight, from which it seemed nothing save a terribly rude shock would wake her.

It came at last. An old pensioner of Keith's was dying in a village some three miles off, and he, unable to go and see the poor soul himself, as he had to go to town, asked Annette to visit the invalid instead, and take a liberal money present. This his fiancée gladly agreed to do, and being tender-hearted, and pitying the poor sick creature whom she had known in her happier days, she put a bottle of wine, a jelly, and some fruit in a basket, and set out on her way through the woods, now more silent than in the earlier months, when the merry songsters were wooing and pairing, and were not burdened with family cares.

She had not gone far when she was joined by the Captain, who had been on the look out for her, knowing the coast was clear, and his friend miles away on his road to London.

"Where are you going?" he questioned, when the first greetings were over.

"To Panton."

"What are you going there for?"

"To see Mrs. Linton. The poor soul is dying."

"And those are dainties for her?" nodding at the basket.

"Yes."

"Let me carry it. It is too heavy for you."

"No, really, it is not weighty."

"You must let me have it," he rejoined authoritatively, taking the basket from her hand, while a lovely blush rose to her cheek as she met his glance, and his fingers for an instant closed over hers.

"Keith has gone, I suppose!" she asked, to break the silence that somehow was a little embarrassing.

"Yes. Started at nine, all eagerness to get back."

"To get back before he had started!"

"Yes, and were I in his place I should be just as eager, if not more so," he returned significantly, with a significance that brought the red blood mantling again to cheek and brow,

caused her lips to droop, and kept her silent and coy.

He was more careful after that, and they reached Panton, left the dainties and money for the sick woman, and were returning leisurely towards Rock Mount, when a vivid flash of lightning rent the heavens, followed by a terrific peal of thunder, and a perfect deluge of rain.

Leslie hurried his companion across the wide field they were traversing into the friendly shelter of the wood; but, to his surprise, when he stopped beneath the spreading branches of a gigantic chestnut to let her rest and regain breath, he found that she was trembling violently, her face ashy pale, her eyes widely distended, and full of fear. She had a horror of lightning. Brave in other respects, she was a perfect coward in a thunderstorm.

Once, when very young, she saw a man and his dog struck down and killed a few feet from her, and neither time nor any other thing could wipe out the memory of that dreadful sight, that mass of swollen, blackened flesh, that a few minutes before had been a breathing, living creature, full of health and strength.

"Are you frightened? Does a storm alarm you?" he asked, with great concern.

"Yes, yes," she murmured. "It is horrible!" as a burning flash, flamed from the sky, and lit up the dim recesses of the wood with its lurid glare. "It terrifies me," and she covered her eyes with her trembling hands.

"Put your face here," he whispered, drawing her close to him; and hardly knowing what she did in her terror, she buried her face on his breast, while he twined both arms round the slender, shivering form, as though to guard her from the fury of the storm; and thus they stood, while it howled and raged around, in all its awful grandeur, heart to heart, each tremor of her body sending a fierce pulse through his, thrilling him with rapture, making him lose self-control, forget honour, think of nothing save his mad, wild love for her, and the sweet possibility that she returned it.

"Look up, dearest!" he whispered after awhile, "look up, Annette, the storm has passed. Listen, the thunder is now quite distant."

Slowly she raised her head, and seeing none of the flashes she so dreaded, and hearing only distant mutterings, recovered a little, and tried to withdraw herself from his encircling arms, but he held her tight.

"Let me go, please," she murmured, her pale cheek flaming as she realised her situation for the first time.

"Let you go!" he repeated, reproachfully, gazing down into her face with a glow of passion in his eyes that struck her dumb, made her shrink from him.

"Annette, my own Annette," he whispered, his lips close to her ear. He might have spared her, weak, faint, trembling as she was, but the blood coursed and throbbed through his veins in a way which defied restraint. "My own, mine alone."

"No, no," she gasped with ashy lips, trying desperately to wrench herself from his embrace. "No, no, you must not say that. Think of Keith; I am Keith's promised wife."

"You do not love him," he returned, almost sullenly, angry to find she could think of the man to whom she was pledged at such a moment.

"You must not say that," she moaned.

"I must," he went on, with fiery eagerness. "I have been dumb up to now, but now I must speak. The feelings of my heart overpower me. It has been stirred to the depths. Pity me, love me."

"Do not, do not speak like this," she implored, wildly. "I cannot, dare not break my word to Keith. I cannot fall him."

"Yet you fall me!"

"I was never bound to you."

"Would to Heaven you were," with a convulsive clasp of the arms that held her.

"Have mercy, let me go," she pleaded, in her terror and distress, for the look in his eyes frightened her.

"I will let you go if you give me one kiss."

"I dare not—have pity. Keith, think of him."

"I am no saint, only a man sorely tried," he replied; "spare me this moment, think only of me. He will have you all his life, I shall be alone. Give me, then, the pledge I ask for, lay those sweet lips on mine."

"I cannot betray Keith," she muttered, faintly. "I cannot be disloyal."

"This minute is mine," he said, passionately, "all the rest are his, it is no disloyalty. You are mine, not his for this brief while;" and as he spoke he stooped his head: she did not draw back. Perhaps she lacked the strength, perhaps the chill damp was stealing into her veins, checking the warm life glow, and their lips met, his hot as fire, hers cold as ice. Then he clasped his arms and she fell at his feet, crushed and shame-stricken and almost senseless.

His heart smote him, disreputable and dishonourable as he was, when he saw her lying there at his feet, helpless and forlorn, her white dress dragged with the dew of the long grasses, her hair loosened and disordered, her face like death itself. He sank on his knees beside her, and chafed the icy hands, begging her to forgive him, in most humble terms, beseeching her not to fear him. But she hardly heard him; a deadly faintness stole over her, for a little time she was unconscious. When her senses returned she looked up at him with eyes that were so heavy and sad, that he felt like a murderer; and such he was, in truth, for he had slain the happiness of her young life.

"Shall I take you home?" he queried, uneasily, flinching under the gaze of those mournful violet orbs.

"Please."

She rose slowly, and heavily, and together in silence they wended their way towards her home. He left her when they reached the rustic bridge that spanned the Dell, with simply a hand pressure, and she went alone through the quaint, old garden, up to the house. She stumbled once or twice like a blind creature, without the support of his arm, and Mrs. Travers, who came to meet her in the porch, was frightened at the expression and pallor of her face.

"My darling child, were you out in that storm?" she cried, with effusive affection.

"Yes, mother."

"We hoped you were under cover. You were terrified of course!"

"Yes, mother," her stiff lips seemed unable to frame any other words.

"Poor darling, come in, we must take off those wet things at once, and it will be better for you to go to bed, and have a warm posset."

Passively Annette allowed herself to be undressed and put to bed; with equal passiveness she took everything offered to her. "She was numbed, dazed and glad that others attended to her wants. All the attentions, however, failed to avert the ill consequences of the severe wetting."

A cold ensued, attended with very feverish symptoms, which necessitated her remaining in her room for over a week. Even when she was better she did not seem inclined to leave her own private bower, which Mrs. Travers looked upon as a very bad symptom, for Annette was seldom ill, and when she was never cared to lay up.

The truth was she dreaded to encounter either of her lovers. She feared Keith would know by intuition that she unwittingly had played him false, had let her heart be won from its allegiance to him, while, as for Leslie, she felt she could never meet the impugning glances of his eyes again.

Their lips had met, and she was pledged to another, for weal or woe, for life, till death parted them. She felt shamed and overwhelmed. Her eyes were opened. She could never go back to the old, free, pleasant intercourse with Rowland.

Everything was changed since he had spoken, and she dared not, must not, see him again until she was safe, until she was Keith Drummond's wedded wife, his so securely that nothing could come between them, nothing part them—save death.

CHAPTER VI.

ANETTE was firm in her determination to be faithful, in word and deed, to the man who was her promised husband. She saw him when she was convalescent, and answered his eager inquiries with her usual gentleness. If she was nervous and pale, and a shade colder in her manner, he did not notice it, or attributed it to her illness.

But as the days wore on he wondered at her continued listlessness, and her evident reluctance to come to the Royal. She invariably made an excuse when he asked her, and hardly ever left the garden of Rock Mount.

She had a good reason for this, though he did not know it. Rowland Leslie had been most particular in his inquiries during her indisposition, and had called several times since, but Annette never saw him.

Steadily she refused to come down when he was there, and avoided every place at which she was likely to meet him; and he at last, wearied by his fruitless attempts to see her, or struck by a sudden sense of his own baseness, left Drummond Royal and returned to town.

When he was gone Annette breathed freer, and went about with a feeling of security to which she had long been a stranger, striving to take interest in the preparations for her marriage, which was to take place in September, and to forget that brief episode which had been so dangerously sweet, and yet so terribly bitter.

Though she conquered, to a certain extent, still she was not the same girl; and Willie, watching her with eyes that were not blinded with a lover's tenderness, saw this change, and wondered what caused it.

She was composed, apathetic, indifferent to all and everyone save Keith, and with him she was anxiously nervous to please. She sorely puzzled her brother.

All her child-like simplicity seemed to have vanished; she took keen pleasure in nothing; neither in the brilliant future that lay before her, nor the costly gifts heaped on her by friends and relatives.

She hardly glanced at the rich dresses prepared for her trousseau, at the delicate laces and dainty linens, and seemed totally uninterested when the rouse of the honeymoon was discussed.

Still she made no effort to escape the marriage, and was most solicitous to do whatever Keith wished.

He was so generous, noble, devoted, her heart reproached her for its *l'es-majesté*.

When she thought of all she was to him, how he had turned to her for all his pleasure and happiness for so many years, how his love for her had saved him from becoming a misanthrope, and, perhaps, a madman, giving him an interest in life, something to live for, she felt she could not do enough, that no sacrifice would be too great to make for him.

And so the sultry August days wore away, and September came on apace. The sickle was busy amid the golden grain, the harvest was being garnered, the vines were heavy with their load of luscious fruit, and the foliage was beginning to turn, to change from vivid green to bronze, yellow, and scarlet, the evenings were drawing in, the mornings getting chilly, huge clusters of blackberries appearing on the hedgetops, and amid the stubble rang the sharp pluck of the rifle. Ruddy-garbed autumn had arrived, and brought with it Annette's wedding day.

Very lovely she looked as she stood beside Keith at the altar, her beautiful pale face enveloped in folds of costly Honiton, her long, snowy robes falling around in billowy waves.

Never more lovely, thought Rowland Leslie, as he stood and watched her with devouring eyes.

He had come down to the wedding, being hidden to it, with heaps of others, by the master of the Royal; and being too selfish a man to consider the bride's feelings in any way, and having a mad desire to see her again, he stood amid the throng of guests, absorbed in his contemplation of her.

But she never looked at him, never lifted the

heavy lids that veiled the violet orbs, so he was baulked in part. Still, afterwards, at the breakfast, he lounged up, cool and nonchalant, and offered his congratulations and wishes for great happiness—wishes which were received with uplifted lids and apparent calmness—only the scorching blush that rose to her cheek, and which she could not control, and the trembling of the sweet lips told a tale which filled him with a fierce delight.

"Lucky girl you are!" said Dora Murray, as she helped to array the bride in a superb travelling gown of Worth's manufacture.

"Do you think so?" rejoined Mrs. Drummond, with a little sigh and a glance at her face, which was whiter than ever now that the blush had died away.

"Of course I do. Don't you think you are?"

"I suppose so," with another sigh.

"How lackadaisical you seem."

"Do I?"

"That you do. Perhaps you think you would have been luckier had you secured Adonis, with his blue eyes, and golden hair, and empty pockets."

"Hardly," returned Annette, with an assumption of coolness she was far from feeling, and then to turn the subject said, "This is the last time you will act as bridesmaid."

"Yes," returned Dora, with thinly-veiled glees.

"When is the happy event to come off?"

"The first of next month."

"We shall not be back by that time."

"No. I am so sorry about it."

"Never mind. I won't forget a present for you."

"Thanks."

"What would you like?"

"A set of camoes from Rome."

"Very well. I will get dogs or horses if I can, as they will please Sir Humphrey."

"Just so," and with a laugh the camoes passed down the great, wide caken staircase, and Annette, entering the travelling carriage that was waiting was driven off with her husband, en route for the Continent.

"Wish I was in his place," muttered Leslie, casting an envious glance after the rapidly-disappearing carriage. "A lovely wife, a splendid estate, and ten thousand a year! Some fellows get everything, confound them, and others nothing," and digging his heel savagely into the gravel he went up, re-entered the house, and solaced himself with a soda-and brandy and a game of billiards.

Keith took his young wife for a long tour abroad. Everything was new to her; and though he had seen all the show places of Europe many times, he saw fresh beauties in them when visited again with her.

The magnificent scenery of Interlaken was more magnificent, Lucerne fairer, the Rhg more stupendous, "pleasant Veron" pleasanter, romantic Venice more romantic, handsome Milan handsomer, beautiful Genoa lovelier, Naples more like home—far more interesting—Nuremberg, Frankfurt, and other quaint German cities quainter and quainter.

Everything assumed a new aspect. He forgot his own satiety of the scenes and places in describing them to her, and showing her the choicest bits; and she was interested and delighted, and forgot for awhile her heart-troubles.

It was when they returned to Drummond Royal, when the excitement of travelling was over, and she had time to think, and Keith time to observe her closely, that both became more grave and serious.

She was always cheerful to him, always ready to do what he wished; never contradicted or crossed him; was docile and obedient—and yet, and yet there was something wanting, he felt. She was generally very pale, and sometimes, when he came upon her unobserved, he noticed a sadly winful expression in the violet eyes, that pained and perplexed him.

(Continued on page 83.)

"THE HUMAN HAIR: Its Restoration and Preservation." A Practical Treatise on Baldness, Greyhairs, Superfluous Hair, &c. 40 pages. Post-free six stamps from Dr. BORN, Hair Specialist, Bournemouth.

LITTLE TIM.

—101—

OLD Aunt Jane sat beside her apple-stall all day thinking of poor sick Barney at home, and hoping little Anne, the daughter of the laundress in the next room, would not forget to see to him a little.

At dusk she hastened home to don her best, happy if she had money enough for the "sup of tay," the liniment, the medicine, and the bit to lay over for "the rin'."

Aunt Jane was kind to everybody, but kindest of all to little Tim Barron—Lame Tim, the shoe-black, who had his box in the doorway not far off.

Her interest in him began on the day when a big ruffian stole his stock-in-trade, broke his crutch, and beat him with the pieces, and left him bleeding in the alley-way.

Aunt Jane had her hands full with Barney and the rent, but she helped the little orphan home to her room, nursed him well, and set him up in his business again close to her stall, where many a rosy apple fell to his share, and what the boy was more thankful for still, many a kind word, such as a mother might have given to her child.

It was Aunt Jane, too, who interviewed old Mr. Raleigh, the philanthropist, and a trustee of a certain great charity, and got Tim taken into a great school, where boys were trained at once for scholars and farmers.

So Tim went away, and Jane kept her stall as before, and had the usual up and down luck, until one bitter winter everything seemed to turn fairly against her.

Poor old Barney died, and his funeral was a great expense. "The bits of things" were sold, and Jane went to lodge with little Anne's mother, but her heart was heavy. And she made mistakes, and was robbed and cheated of apples and sweets. And at last one Saturday night, when she had what she called the "week's makings" in her pocket, a strange young man, well dressed, bought a dozen oranges, and gave her a half-sovereign to change.

She gave him every penny in her pocket, besides the oranges, and discovered an hour after that the money was counterfeit. It was a rainy night, and, overheated by excitement, she caught a heavy cold and fell into pneumonia.

Anne's mother was a close woman, and poor besides. She could not afford to keep a lodger who could not pay for the last week's rent, and was to be ill the coming one. She sent Jane to the hospital.

That was the end of all the poor soul's independence—the one thing she had prided herself on. She had not a friend who could help her; and so, after such a struggle with starvation as people seldom come out of alive, she was considered lucky in being sent to the workhouse.

All this was slow in coming about, and it was just ten years from the day on which she had bought little Lame Tim his new blacking box, that, bowed with shame, she took her place amongst paupers—the who had been so industrious and so proud.

Hot tears fell over the wrinkled face. She was very miserable. Many about her, who had beggars' souls, and only repined because workhouse fare was hard, could not comprehend her trouble; but one pious old woman, trying to help her, whispered, "that Sunday was always a comfort; that there was preaching and hymns; and the parson told them those who were poor went to Heaven as fast as the rich. Sunday come, you'll cheer up a bit," said she.

But old Jane could not forget how, poor as she had been, she had always gone to church on Sunday in a clean dress and tidy hat, and had never failed to put sixpence into the contribution plate.

"I doubt there's a dale of comfort in pauper preaching," she said.

But Sunday came. Old Jane's "first pauper Sunday," as she said to herself. There was some extra dish for breakfast. The chapel bell clanged and jangled under the uncertain touch of an old pauper, and the old people, the cripples, the half-witted folk, made their way in doleful procession, along the dusty path of the bare grounds to the door of the place of worship.

They stumbled into their seats, some of the

old women noticing that the matron had a new bonnet; others moving mechanically, and heedless of nothing. But soon a whisper came down the bench where Jane sat,—

"It's not our own minister. No, it's a new preacher—a young thing—just a bit of a boy." And dissatisfaction was expressed as a pale, slender young man, with a sweet face, and just a little limp in his gait, stepped into the pulpit and said: "Let us pray."

The prayer was brief and earnest, and the tones of his voice mollified all the old women at once; and then the hymn was sung by all the poor, cracked, wavering voices; and then the young man began to talk to them in a tender, kindly sort of way, as he might to his own old grandparents if they had been in sorrow.

"Young folks is mostly so stuck up. He isn't," said Jane's neighbour.

"I've seen the face before," thought Jane. "Where was it? I've heard the voice, and I still don't know where."

He was speaking of the trials of the poor now. And as she listened she felt that he knew by experience what they really were.

She listened, and forgot her surroundings; forgot that she was a pauper; remembered only that Heaven was for all, and God's love for all, and that Jesus was the Saviour of the beggar as of the king. And suddenly she heard the preacher say these words:—

"Oh, I know how hard it is. I know. I know. Do you think I was born a rich man's son? No, friends; I was left in the great and wicked city a poor little orphan. I earned my bread by blacking boots. I was very lame then, and walked with a crutch, and I was not able to read."

"One day, a great boy beat and robbed me of my stock-in-trade. I was very ill after that, and I do not know what would have become of me but for a dear old woman—an old woman who earned her bread by sitting at a stall all day. She became my patron, she nursed me, she started me afresh in my boot-blacking, she helped me home, she cared for me as if I had been her child. Through her influence a rich gentleman was brought to notice me, and sent me to school. That I have prospered, that I am no longer so sad a cripple, that I have an education, is all due, in the beginning under God, to that poor apple woman. I pray for her every night. I think of her as those who have known their mothers think of them; and I know now, better than I did as a child, how much all that she did was for her to do, with her tiny earnings and a bed-ridden husband to care for."

"Ah, friends, when I speak of the trials of the poor I speak from experience; when I speak of the goodness and charity there is amongst them it is because I have experienced that also."

As he spoke on, the Order of Poverty seemed to become a crown, and not a cross.

His listeners looked more kindly at each other, lovingly at him. As for old Jane, she trembled from head to foot, for she knew this minister was he who had once been little Lame Tim, the shoe-black.

As the procession filed out of the chapel again, she made her courtesy to the matron.

"May I speak to the gentleman that preached to us, ma'am?" she said. "He knowed me once."

And permission being given, she lingered near the door until he passed through it, and gently touching his arm, said,—

"Sir, you wouldn't be remembering me after all these years, but I'm—"

But here the young preacher interrupted her.

"You're Aunt Jane!" he said, and took both her hands and kissed her on the forehead. "Aunt Jane. Thank Heaven, I have found you!"

It was poor old Jane's last pauper day. In a happy country home she now presides over a little parsonage, housekeeper to the clergyman, tenderly cared for as though she were of his own kin.

"I wonder you're not ashamed of me," she says sometimes, "a poor, unlearned old woman."

But the clergyman answers,—

"You were not ashamed of me, Aunt Jane, when I was little Lame Tim the shoe-black."

THE BROWN LADY.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN she came to herself, which was not for some time, someone was pouring sherry down her throat. Someone's strong supporting arm was round her neck. She looked about her wildly, and a brown hood became visible. A pair of piercing dark eyes looked back into her own. She shuddered and tried to shrink away, but a rather deep voice said in a reproachful tone,—

"You need not be the least afraid of me! I will do you no harm. I am not a ghost, as many people think. I am a human being, like yourself. Feel me!" and she put out a beautiful soft small hand, on which sparkled some superb diamond rings.

"Then who are you?" said the girl, faintly.

"You shall know soon enough. I can't stop talking here in this vile cellar. I dare say you can walk now. Get up and try."

Linda staggered to her feet as desired, and tottered a few steps.

"Ah! I see you are very weak. Here, take my arm, and lean on me, and come along."

"Where are you taking me?" said Linda, hanging back.

"To very comfortable quarters," she answered, as they passed through the door, which she stopped to bar and lock, and Linda noticed that she carried a heavy bunch of big keys depending from her side.

They went slowly down a long flagged passage, through a door at the end, which she also locked, then up a spiral flight of back stairs, through a door at the top of this, which was also carefully locked and bolted; then the Brown Lady pulled back a heavy curtain, and they were both standing in a narrow hall, lit by a hanging lamp, carpeted with thick Persian rugs, and hung with paintings.

"Where am I?" asked the girl, in bewilderment.

"Come in here and sit down, and I'll tell you," said the figure, escorting her into a well-lighted sitting-room most luxuriously furnished, with a roaring log fire. A cloth was spread, and a dainty repast was laid out on a round table drawn up close to the fire, and sitting in front of the blaze was a large black cat. The cat! Linda eyed the raised pie, and cold ham, and plum cake and other viands with famished eyes, which the other noticed said,—

"How long were you there?"

"Two days and two nights!"

The Brown Lady made a horrified gesture with her beautiful hands, and said,—

"Poor child! You must be nearly dead!" and suddenly stooped over a little silver sancepan that stood inside the fender. She raised the lid; the contents melted uncommonly tempting. It was soup, hot, strong soup, a cup of which and a bit of bread was put into Linda's trembling hands.

Her hands shook so excessively with hunger and weakness that she could hardly feed herself. The Brown Lady made her take two cups of soup, two slices of bread, a glass of sound old port, and then said, imperatively,—

"There, that's as much as I can allow you to have at present, and now guess where you are!"

"I cannot."

"Then I suppose I must tell you. You are in the east wing, the haunted east wing!" and her eyes laughed. Her mouth was consoled by a sort of arrangement like what Turkish women wear. "You know about the horrible murder of course!"

"Yes," said Linda, with a shudder. "I was the first to know of it. I wonder no one missed me, no one has been to search for me since."

"They have been searching for you everywhere these two days," said the Brown Lady, dryly.

"Ah! I knew they would! Who has been looking?"

"Well, everyone in general, and the police in particular."

"The police!" she echoed, with a start. "Why the police!"

"Can you not guess?"

"Indeed I cannot. I should have thought they would have been looking for the murderer."

"So they are. They think you did it!"

"I! Great Heavens!"

"Yes, and though you and I know who the real culprit is, appearances are black against you."

"Against me?" she echoed in a faint voice.

"Yes, you were last in his room. He was strangled with your belt! The money is missing, and so are you!"

"Oh, oh! I see it all!" said the girl, covering her face with her hands. "Surely I was born to misfortune. Oh, I wish I had never, never been born!"

"Nonsense!" said the Brown Lady, sharply.

"If you were me you might say that, but a beautiful girl like you, with health and wit and all life before her—"

"Yes, and look at the life that lies behind me!" said the girl, bitterly. "No home, no friends, starving at one time, charged with murder at another, without a place to shelter my head, no father, no mother, and my only relation wickedly murdered!"

"Some of what you say is true, some is not correct. You have a place to hide your head, you can live here as long as you like in the east wing with me. I have lived here thirty-five years, and you have a relation, if you are, as I believe you to be, Arabella Holroyd's daughter. You have a relation in me—I am your aunt!"

"Aunt?"

"Yes. I am your grand-aunt, your grandmother's sister. I was many years younger than she was, and my name is Eleanor Cranford, though, on the other hand, I am known, and wish to be known, as the Brown Lady."

"Why?"

"Because it ensures privacy. Thirty-five years ago I came here secretly, and was installed by my sister and Holroyd in this east wing. It is my house, my home."

"And how do you live? How do you get food?"

"I live most comfortably. Glubb is in the secret, so is the old cook. Of course I make it well worth their while. There is a sort of hole in the wall with a shutter, and twice a day my food is passed through, also books, papers, letters. Glubb is my agent. All my doings are in her name."

"I often wondered why she got so many letters and papers and parcels of books!"

"Well, now you know."

"And do you never go out?"

"Certainly. I go about the grounds—after dark or early in the morning. I wear a poke bonnet, a shawl, and a thick veil, and I am taken for a sister of Glubb's if I am met—a sister of hers, who is not very bright and is dumb. I even go to church in the winter evenings, and sit well back, where I am not noticed in the free seats. I see from your face, from your widely-distended eyes, that you would like to ask why I do all this, but my good, grandniece, I must leave you to wonder for the present. It would not be good for you to hear too many secrets all at once, would it?"

"It was you who came to my room and pulled the clothes off my face?" said Linda.

"Yes; and how you struggled, you little goose, and I only wanted to warn you. You interested me from the first day I saw you, from your extraordinary resemblance to Arabella. You quite startled me. I thought it was the girl herself come back to life."

"And another time I met you in a passage."

"Yes, you did. Oh! I'm often met. I constantly go about the house—it amuses me. I see a great deal more than the people that live there. I see the flirtations of Nannie, the speculations of the cook, I see Leech levying toll on the port wine, I see Glubb—who is a miser—counting over her hoards. I know where she keeps them, too! You will ask how I do all this. In the first place look at my bunch of keys. I can unlock every door in the house. Secondly, this place—the older portion—was once a celebrated nunnery; that walled courtyard outside your dungeon was once a part of the cloisters. The whole

place is honeycombed with secret passages by means of which the nuns used to keep their eyes on the novices and boarders, young ladies from titled families. I have all these passages at my finger ends, and can find my way about them blindfold at this moment!" She paused, seeing her young guest's eyes fixed on the doorway with undisguised amazement.

What was she looking at? Two little dwarfs who had come to remove the supper things.

They were about three feet high, each very neatly proportioned, middle-aged, and exactly alike—evidently twins. They wore miniature editions of two superior family servants, and wore neat stiff gowns, white aprons, and rather smart caps. Their little hands removing the plates was a funny sight, no bigger than those of a child of four years old.

"Ah! you are looking at Minnie and Brenelle," said their mistress, complacently. "They are worth their weight in gold. Have you made up a bed in my room?" she asked, addressing the dwarfs.

"Yes, ma'am," said a little squeaky voice.

"Then, when you have carried away the things, see that there is a good fire."

"Yes, ma'am," squeaked the other, and they bustled out with the tray between them.

"They surprise you, I suppose! I'll tell you how I came to have them. They are daughters of a baker, twins, and they say that sleeping in a room over the oven stopped their growth. There they are, at any rate, fit for any show. In their father's time they got along very well, but when he died, their brother, who is six feet high, wanted to sell them to a show. They had no alternative between that and the workhouse, for their father died suddenly, and was in difficulties at his death. The poor little creatures nearly broke their hearts, and, hearing about them, I offered them an asylum here, and here they have been for ten years, and we get on capitally. They are excellent, devoted servants. Their only weakness you would not guess—personal vanity. They think they are beautiful, and, if anything, it is the rest of the world who are malformed; all the same, they shun the public life."

"I had a giantess for some years. She was rather big for these rooms—nearly eight feet high, and she found the place too dull, and joined a caravan, and went to America. Once or twice she made her way into the house and about the grounds, and terrified people out of their senses. The dwarfs go into the village sometimes—they are supposed to be related to the cook—and to pay her visits occasionally."

"And now, you poor, starved girl, go to bed; or, rather, come, and I'll show you where you are to sleep," leading the way, as she spoke into another room—a bedroom, with two beds, one draped with velvet and lace, the other a temporary couch.

The magnificence of this room amazed Linda. Her feet sank in rich carpet. All the curtains and hangings were of velvet; the toilet arrangement, brushes and boxes, were of chased silver, but there was no looking-glass!

The nightgown laid out for her was made of cambric and exquisite lace; everything about her spoke of luxury—such luxury as she had never come across in her life!

"I see you are surprised at my little nest. That picture over the fireplace cost a thousand pounds last month. I saw a notice of it in a paper, and wrote up and bought it."

"A thousand!" said Linda. "A thousand pounds!"

"That's not much—not to me. I am a very rich woman. Your grandmother and I were co-heiresses. I meant to have left all my money to your mother, but I was very angry at her marriage. Mind what you are about when you marry!"

"I shall never marry!" said Linda, in a weary voice.

"Nonsense! nonsense! Now undress, and go to bed. I'll come afterwards, and expect to find you sound asleep. There's the dressing-room; it has hot and cold water. Make yourself at

home," and, with a wave of her hand, the lady departed.

Linda noticed that the gown she wore was rich black velvet, this and a cloak with a hood and muffler completed her attire.

Her eyes were fine, but very piercing; her forehead was broad, her hair, when visible, fine as silk, black, with a few grey streaks.

Worn out with fatigue and mental agitation, Linda got into a nice little white camp bed, and was soon sound asleep.

She awoke once, it was the middle of the night. A little silver lamp was burning in the room. Long-drawn breathing showed her that her aunt—her new and mysterious relative—was sound asleep.

Curiosity is common to all, especially, I think, to young people. Curiosity had hold of her, and with a sudden impulse, she sat up in bed. Perhaps she could catch a glimpse of the Brown Lady's face now; perhaps now she could discover why she wore that strange muffler.

She felt a twinge of guilt as she slowly raised herself. Was it fair to take advantage of her aunt's slumbers to satisfy her craving? Fair or not, she must look; and, pushing all scruples aside, she raised her head, and peeped.

Alas, for her hopes! Her aunt lay fast asleep on her side, her faultless hands alone lay outside the counterpane. Her mysterious face was entirely covered by a thick white gauze or cambric mask!

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHEN Linda awoke the next morning and looked round the strange room, she had to pinch her arm severely to make herself aware that she was not still asleep and dreaming.

This luxurious apartment, with its soft Persian carpet, heavy velvet curtains, carved furniture and fine paintings, was a bed-room—the Brown Lady's own bower—and the Brown Lady was no dreadful villainess from another world, but her own aunt—her grand-aunt, Eleanor! And where was she! Her bed was empty!

As Linda sat up and stared about her, one of the dwarfs entered, carrying a gown over her arm—a heavy weight under which she staggered—and said, in her little squeaky voice,—

"My lady sent you this, miss, this dress. It's one of hers, and may make shift to fit you, your own dress being very thin, and all stained with damp, and torn. Shall I help you to dress, miss?"

"No, thank you," said the girl, staring at the queer little figure that was not much higher than her knee! Of what possible assistance could this human doll be to anyone's toilette!

"I can do your hair," said the dwarf rather imperiously, "just as well as the best hair-dresser that ever was born! You try and see if I can't!"

But this offer was also declined, and saying—"Your bath is laid out in the dressing-room, and breakfast will be ready in half-an-hour," Minna withdrew with rather a lofty air.

Breakfast was a most dainty repast, laid out on a round table before a roaring fire, in front of which the black cat sat and blinked stolidly at the blaze. The Brown Lady was muffled up as usual, and seemed much less disposed for conversation than the previous night.

"The fact is, my dear," she explained, "you must not mind my silence. I am not used to hearing the sound of my own voice, and just at this very moment my mind is greatly occupied!"

Linda looked up at her interrogatively, and she added,—

"Yes; and about you! You must remain here, hidden quietly for a time until my poor brother-in-law's murderer is tracked down, and until I make Isaac Holroyd disgorge the proofs he holds of your identity. You won't find the time very long, I hope. I have plenty of books, and I know you are fond of reading."

"Does not the time seem very long to you sometimes?" asked the girl, "having no companion, no one to talk to but the two dwarfs?"

"Strange as you may think it, it does not. Reuben, the cat, is my companion. I am used

to this life now, and sometimes the days seem far too short."

Linda stared at her with a puzzled expression. "Yes, you may well look surprised; but what I say is perfectly true! Besides my books and a constant supply of all the best literature of the day, I have a dear friend—my pen. I write, and find it a never failing and ever-absorbing recreation."

"Letters, do you mean?"

"No, no, child! books. Come with me and see my study and library," crossing the room and opening a door as she spoke. Linda followed her into a small round room, lighted by three windows—a sunny, cheerful apartment, in a turret evidently, and looking out upon an unfrequented portion of the pleasure grounds.

"A charming place, indeed!" she remarked, looking about her, and then out of the window. "But I wonder you have never been found out, that no one has noticed this tower room!"

"There is no one to notice or search. There is something in that, you see; and I paid a handsome price to your grandfather for my little suite of secret chambers. My quarterly cheque went a long way towards keeping up the place. He was fond of money. Well, we have all our weaknesses, and he took precautions for my privacy long ago, knowing that if I were disturbed I would go away."

"And what do you write? What kind of books?" said the girl, glancing rather eagerly at the well-appointed writing-table.

"I am known to the world as Richard Hosenack."

"What!" interrupted her niece. "And have you written those delightful novels 'Meadowfield Hall' and 'The Ice Maiden' that I have been reading lately to Mr. Holroyd?"

The Brown Lady nodded.

"He was charmed with them; and I myself could not wait to finish them alone. I took them off, and set up late at night devouring them! I read them twice!"

"I am glad they pleased you, my dear!"

"Pleased everyone! Did you not read the splendid notice in the *Saturday Review*, and another in the *Times*? That was what made Mr. Holroyd, I mean my grandfather, send for them."

"Yes, I read them; and these appreciative notices are some of my pleasures."

"Where do you get all your ideas? The stories are life itself."

"I see, and have seen, a great deal more of life than you imagine, my child. I read too."

"But—"

"But that is not everything, you would say. Well, I suppose, as a compensation for other things, I have been gifted with some genius."

"Genius! I should think so! And is not that better than any other gift?" said the girl, enthusiastically.

"No!" said the Brown Lady, with a heavy sigh. "No, not in my opinion. And now I will leave you with a good novel, a good fire, and the cat for company, for I have a great deal to do on your behalf to-day."

"What have you to do?"

"Well, to settle up a bed-room for you for one thing; to make inquiries about the dark deed that has been done, for another; to write important letters, for a third."

It was well a bed-room was got ready for Linda, for she occupied it incessantly for nearly six weeks.

Too intense cold and damp, and the long starvation she had endured in the vault-like kitchen, threw her into a kind of rheumatic fever, which made her feel as if all her bones were being tightly stretched upon a rack.

Through this fever she was nursed with unremitting assiduity by her aunt and the two dwarfs; and by the time she was convalescent she and Reuben were on the best of terms, and he had quite adopted her into the family.

Outside her hiding-place the great hue and cry after her was gradually abating.

By the time that Linda was convalescent, and sitting up at the fire in a priceless sable cloak belonging to her grand-aunt, that energetic but

mysterious lady thought it was time once more to take an active interest in her niece's worldly affairs.

Isaac Holroyd must be awake from his dream of false security.

Both his son and Isaac, being nearest at hand, she proceeded to rouse him up without delay in the following effectual manner.

Isaac had never been in the secret of the Brown Lady, and had always turned a deaf ear to all tales of her appearance, of the agonising effect she had had on various unfortunate people. He did not believe in her at all—no, not even if he saw her, he was bold enough to say.

One evening he happened to be alone—Gordon, as we know, seldom favoured him with his company.

Two much impressed clients and guests had just left. He had made an excellent dinner, had decanted the best part of a bottle of famous old port into his long, lean person, and felt on the best possible terms with himself—ay, and all mankind.

How soon are the dead forgotten! He had only occupied his brother's place for seven little weeks, and he positively felt as if he had been established in it seven years.

He sat in his own special sanctum—a room that he had especially selected as having a southern aspect—no draughts whatever, and above all, no gloomy memories.

He sat in an arm chair with his back to the fire, facing a large, roomy writing table, and proceeded to indulge in a rather favourite occupation—that of drawing out and looking over bonds and banking accounts, at sums lying in his own name—and, besides all these, he looked over a certain packet of old letters.

These letters had a queer fascination for him. This was by no means the first time he handled them and turned them over—though he did not often read them—but they had a curious fascination for him.

He liked to take them out and hold them in his hand. He toyed with them as he would have done with some dangerous weapon.

If he had been a prudent man he would have destroyed these yellow faded epistles twenty years previously, but they still existed.

He had a curious superstitious feeling about them, and this odd, inexplicable superstition withheld his hand from the flames.

They were letters he had intercepted from his niece to her father; these were eliminating letters from Miss Mee to himself, acknowledging payment for the child.

What odd madness possessed him to keep all these proofs? Who can say? Some people's actions are unaccountable to themselves, much less to their neighbours.

Isaac looked through the packet slowly, then laid it down, and pushed it somewhat petulantly from him, and sank into thought.

Where was the girl? Why had she done it!—meaning the murder. Had the old man's glib tongue exasperated her to frenzy? Had she been beside herself with passion and on coming to her senses fled in horror from the scene of her crime?

But the bonds, the notes, the diamonds—what of them? Little guessing that all these matters were safely concealed in his son's London lodgings, and that he was only biding his time to turn the diamonds, at any rate, into coin of the realm.

"Old Daoces and young Daoces believe she has been made away with, and Thomas Carlton talks of detectives and search warrants," he muttered, half aloud. "Tom Carlton was always a meddling ass! He is disappointed that there is no will—he expected a nice little legacy. Much will have more. Money goes to money," he soliloquised. "The girl did it, though why, if she believed herself to be—"

Here he paused, and stroked his chin reflectively, and glanced casually at the letters. As he did so he jumped—yes, jumped—in his comfortable spring-seated chair. Did his eyes deceive him, or was it the port wine—or what had come over him?

The room was only lit by one large, shaded, reading-lamp, which, whilst throwing a brilliant

light upon the writing-table, left the remainder of the apartment in comparative obscurity.

There had been another lamp on the table near the door, but it seemed to have gone out quite mysteriously. The object at which Mr. Isaac Holroyd was staring, as if his eyes would leave their sockets, was a very pretty white woman's hand sparkling with rings. It and a portion of wrist were under the full glare of the lamp; and this beautiful symmetrical hand had just closed, in a strong fierce grasp, upon the bundle of letters!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MR. ISAAC HOLROYD'S close-set, watery blue eyes stared out beyond the far-side of the table into the surrounding gloom; and then he made out the owner of the hand—a woman with a hood over her head, the lower part of her face entirely concealed by her brown cloak, but her sharp black eyes were visible, and were fixed on him with piercing intensity. His few hairs seemed to rise erect upon his head, beads of perspiration stood out upon his bald brow—he was face to face with the notorious Brown Lady at last.

Self-preservation is the first law of nature. He could not fly, for the apparition was between him and the door, so he turned round with a frantic impulse, and seized upon the poker, the only weapon within his reach.

"Miserable old man!" said a deep voice, "put down that poker at once. Put it down, I say," it continued imperiously, "or I will throw that lamp at you!"—moving her hand towards it as she spoke—"and you shall perish as you deserve, and be consumed to ashes in the midst of all your ill-gotten wealth."

"Who—who are you?" he gasped in a husky voice.

"I am one who knows you well. I know all your dealings, bad brother, false friend, and forger!"

"Get out, you lying mummer," said the old man, with a sudden access of courage. "Give me back my letters, or I'll brain you! Give them back, I say, thief, and begone, before I raise the house!"

"Raise the house, and you will! Who would venture to come near me!" said the figure. "Keep back! and put down that poker, or on your own head be the result!"

Something in the voice and eyes terrified him, and suddenly dropping the poker with a clang, he sank back into his arm-chair completely cowed.

"Who are you? Are you a spirit—or human creature?"

"It is not for you to know! It is sufficient to tell you that your days are numbered in this house!"

"Give me back those letters!" he said, starting up. "It's a swindle!—a cheat!"

"Compose yourself, Isaac; violence will not avail you! I have proofs that would send you—yes, aged, seemingly respectable, religious, and a county magistrate—to Portland prison for the rest of your life!"

"Proofs—what proofs?"

"Ay, you shall hear!" said the figure, suddenly leaning over and bringing its eyes closer to his.

It seemed to mesmerise him, whilst with distinct but rapid utterance it told him all the things that ever he did—deeds he believed known to no human eye but his own. It told him of scenes with his brother—ay, down to the one recently, when he had endeavoured to borrow money and failed!

It repeated whole conversations between him, his son, his brother, his late niece, Arabella—to which no mortal could have had knowledge. It told him of money secrets and money frauds known only to himself and his most privately guarded memoranda.

In short, it terrified him so completely, and told him so much, that he could only moan and listen with fluttering heart and chattering teeth. He was convinced that he was in the presence of some evil devil!

"And now one last word," said the figure,

impressively. "You have not much longer to live! You are sixty-nine and past! Make the most of the few remaining days, or months, or maybe years. Reform and repent in retirement!"

As these words were spoken, the figure suddenly turned down the lamp and left the room in darkness, and evidently vanished, for there was not another word—no, nor another sound!

For a few seconds Isaac Holroyd felt half stunned; then he got up, and, by the firelight, staggered to the hall and tore at it frantically.

A servant responded running, believing the house to be on fire at the very least.

"Where is she!" almost screamed his master. "Bring a light—bring a light!"

"Where is who, sir?" asked the man, quickly relighting the lamp.

"Why the woman that was here! Did you not meet her on the stairs! A woman in a hood—dressed in brown—a brown cloak!"

"You must mean the 'Brown Lady,' sir," said the servant, after a moment's hesitation. "No, I'm very thankful to say I did not meet her!"

"She must have gone out of that door and along the corridor. She had no other way of leaving this—"

"Not if she were flesh and blood, sir!" said said the man, solemnly. "But the 'Brown Lady' is neither one or the other! She does not want doors and passages! She can go through a stone wall!"

"Well, but letters—real letters—can't through a stone wall. She has stolen most important letters!"

The servant looked respectfully perplexed.

"That figure—that brown woman—came here, and has carried off a packet of most valuable documents—letters—old letters no use to anyone but me. There's a band of brown elastic round them. They are mostly addressed to my brother. I tell you, Richards, if you can get me those letters back without any fuss or talk among the servants, I'll give you a couple of hundred pounds, that I will!"

Mr. Isaac looked livid as he spoke. The fear of the consequences resulting from these letters getting abroad was now far keener at the moment, seeing that he had the protection of Richards, than the awe he felt regarding his recent horrible, truth-telling visitor. Valiantly Richards hunted, and searched, and poked. Not a sign of the packet of letters with the brown band did he ever come across. And how could he? They were safely locked away in the Brown Lady's writing-table, in the haunted east wing!

"Now, my dear," she said to her niece the next morning at breakfast, "your claims are clear. Isaac Holroyd will not be long in Carriabrooke. You shall be its mistress before many weeks are over!" and she proceeded to relate her visit of the previous evening.

"And if—if it all comes true," said the girl, "we will have no longer a shut up east wing, Aunt Eleanor. You will open the mysterious doors and panels, and come and live with me. You must—you are my only relative."

"My good girl, you mean well, but you are talking of impossibilities. Do you think I have lived all my life alone, aloof from the world, for nothing?"

"I suppose you have some reason, but time may—"

"Time can never remove it," she interrupted, quickly. "You said the other day that genius was the greatest gift. What is genius to a creature who can never, never mix with her fellows! who has been cursed—yes, cursed—with a face from which even an animal would recoil!"

"Aunt!"

"Yes. Do I, think you, wear this brown veil for nothing?" she asked, bitterly. "My face is so hideously deformed that I can't bear to look on it myself. I have not seen my reflection for years and years. If I had been born blind or humpbacked it would have been nothing—nothing!" she repeated, with a passionate ring in her voice, "but to be born so as to have to hide oneself in horror all one's life!"

"You may think yourself worse than you are," said Linda, timidly.

"I could not, it would be impossible. And, Linda, I enjoin one thing on you—you must make me a solemn promise that when I die no prying hand, no peering eye, attempts to raise my veil. I'll carry my burden a secret to the grave!"

"I promise," said the girl, "promise solemnly. Did you meet with an accident, or were you born so?"

"I was born so. They say my mother, your great grandmother, a very beautiful and haughty woman, bitterly offended an old gipsy fortune-teller, and drove her out of the place with her dogs, and the old gipsy shrieked a curse that rankled for ever after in my mother's mind."

"You shall never have a son! But you will have two daughters, one will be a beauty and the other a beast!" Your grandmother was born, and was a lovely infant; and grew to be a lovely woman. Some years afterwards I made my appearance; I was not the longed-for boy, and the gipsy's curse had come true!

"My mother fainted when she saw me. I was sent away abroad, and brought up there in secrecy till my mother and father being dead, and I having come in for a large fortune as my sister's co-heiress, she sent for me, and gave me a home here, and here I am."

CHAPTER XXIX.

ALL this time Sir Thomas Carlton and Rupert Dacres had not been idle, nor had the detectives that they had employed. But, as yet, no clue that could be called a "clue" had been discovered.

One or two items of news, indeed, had been picked up from Gordon Holroyd's man—news that might come in useful some day.

Gordon had taken to drinking very hard; indeed, he drank, not from the pure love of liquor, but as if it were to deliberately drown thought, and fuddle his brains. He gambled more than ever, and tempted fate so rashly that his losses were whispered at the clubs with distended eyes and bated breath.

"Gordon Holroyd must be mad!" men declared, "and the sooner he took lodgings in Hanwell the better!"

He was nervous, hated to be alone; was either uproariously merry or deeply depressed. He refused to return to Carriabrooke on any pretence whatever; letters, telegrams from his father all failed to move him. It was not the dread of being under the roof of the uncle he had murdered that deterred him—no, it was the hideous remorse he felt at the fate of the girl he had left to starve in the cellar.

At first he had meant to let her die, and let her secret die with her, and had gone off to London and stayed there two days.

Then he had drunk so heavily that for two days more he did not know what he was doing.

By this time he had repented.

On the fifth—the day of the funeral—he returned to Carriabrooke.

Of course she must be dead by that time; of course, he was now too late, and what was the use of descending to the cellar, only to see some horrible, ghastly spectacle that would infallibly haunt him till his dying day? He did not want that, the old man was enough!

At last, such was Gordon Holroyd's extravagance, that in two months' time he had gambled away every halfpenny of his share of the ill-gotten gains, and was as short of funds as ever.

He lost five thousand pounds in one night, and he wrote and applied to his father for a heavy advance. But Isaac treated him as he had served himself; he took no notice of either letters or telegrams. And so, in the end—furiously angry—Gordon had to come in person.

He was moody and sulky until after dinner, when the good old port was put before him, and the servants had withdrawn. (NB, to discuss Mr. Gordon's wild, bloodshot eyes and very strange manner.)

Then he said abruptly,—

"Governor, you took no notice of my letters, and so I'm come in person! I want a thundering big cheque!"

"I'm afraid you can't be your master!" said his parent, very coldly.

"Don't put me off with stale old sayings, but give me what I want!"

"And that is?"

"Fifteen thousand!"

"Good heavens, sir! are you mad? What have you done with what I made over to you two months ago! Do you suppose I have the Bank of England at my back?"

"No; but I suppose there's a good deal of cutting into two hundred thousand! I want my share."

"Share! and have you not had it! Share! Beyond your allowance I won't give you another penny! I won't allow you to ruin me!"

"Won't you!" said his dutiful offspring, tossing off two glasses almost in a breath; and then leaning his arms on the table, he said in a hoarse voice, "You are to have everything, and I'm to have nothing. I'm to pull the chestnuts out of the fire, am I, and get nothing for my pains!"

"What—what do you mean?" stammered the old man, turning a dull, leaden colour. "Chestnuts out of the fire! What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Gordon, in a dreadful, rasping voice, "that I cleared the way for you—that I did it!"

"I don't believe you!" almost shouted his father. "You don't know what you are saying, sir! You are drunk! roaring drunk!"

"I may be drunk, but I know what I am saying! I tell you, and it's as well you should know, and know my claim, that I did it! The old man would have lived another twenty years!"

"Gordon, your mind is giving way! You know it was the girl! The proofs are clear as day!"

"I am glad you think so! I did for her, too!" Mr. Isaac Holroyd grasped the table with both hands, and gazed at his son with a face like that of a corpse. He could not speak.

"I did!" continued Gordon, doggedly. "I am sorry for her!"

"Where!" said his father, in a dreadful whisper.

"In the old kitchens."

Dead silence. At last Gordon spoke.

"Of course you are safe, safe as myself. And I'll tell you what, give me a good round sum down, and I'll leave the country, and never set foot in it again!"

But, had man as he was, Isaac Holroyd was stricken speechless by this horrible confession.

He sat with a vacant, glassy look in his eyes, and uttered no sound. Presently he rose, as if to leave the room, and fell down on the floor. He had had a paralytic seizure.

Meanwhile Rupert Dacres had become completely discouraged. The whole affair seemed to him to be wrapped in an incomprehensible mystery.

In his own mind, he firmly believed that Linda Delafosse had been murdered by Gordon Holroyd, and that she was concealed or buried somewhere about the place.

He never would see her again—dead or alive—that was certain; but if he could but be the means of bringing her murderer to justice, that would be some small consolation. But what chance of finding any clue in that great building, with its two hundred rooms, or among its acres of pleasure grounds!

All the same his steps often tended in that direction; and it was now the month of April, and many an April evening he haunted the woods and avenues; turned out after dinner, glad to escape from his stepmother's tongue and Marie Cotton's glances, and with a light overcoat over his evening clothes, he would saunter about Carriabrooke demesne alone and unnoticed, for a couple of hours, smoking and thinking—unnoticed by all but the Brown Lady. In her own nocturnal walks she had seen him several times,



THE MOON SHONE DIRECTLY ON THE GIRL'S FACE AS IT WAS TURNED TOWARDS GORDON.

but concealed herself promptly. And now that Linda was convalescent, she determined to send her forth, and make this young man of some use in communicating with the outer world.

But Linda, strange to say, was reluctant to undertake the embassy.

She was weak and shaken after her severe illness, her nerves had gone to pieces in consequence of her terrible experiences.

She knew the black cloud under which her name lay, and had now a most sensitive shrinking from meeting anyone until her name was cleared—if cleared it could ever be.

"Can we not wait?" she suggested to her aunt.

"Wait for what!" demanded that strong-minded person. "Wait till Isaac Holroyd dies! If you mean that, you may wait years! Wait till Gordon confesses! You may wait for ever! No, no! we will have no waiting. Things must at once be put in train to prove your innocence, and to prove your rights, no later than to-night. You must speak to Rupert Dacres."

"Could you not manage to speak to him?"

"No. Dacres is not one of your timid folk who would run away from the Brown Lady. He is much more likely to chase or shoot me. And pray what would become of you then?"

"How do you know he will come this evening?"

"I have a presentiment. You know that part of this demense joins Dacres Court! And young Dacres comes over at least twice a week and strolls about as if he were looking for something. He is generally in the copper-beech avenue, beyond the pleasure-ground. There will be a moon at nine o'clock."

"I—I am afraid to go," confessed the girl at last.

"Afraid of what!" demanded the other scornfully. "If you had said this six months ago I might have understood you. You would have been afraid of me. Now you have no excuse whatever. You know what I am worth as an apparition!"

"I may meet Gordon Holroyd!"

"Pooh! And if you do, he will fly from you, you may be sure of that."

Miss Eleanor had her way, of course; but she mitigated her grandniece's fears by promising to go with her, and to remain within earshot.

Accordingly, at nine o'clock that evening, the two ladies sallied forth arm-in-arm—for it was Linda's first outdoor excursion, and she felt dizzy, and her knees trembled under her as she walked. Her aunt was her staff, and as strong and as upright as a young fir tree.

She wore her usual attire—her brown mantle, Linda her seal-skin coat, with a silk handkerchief tied over head.

It was a cool but beautiful spring night; the birds were in bed, of course; there was not a sound to be heard but the hooting of an owl, or the quick flap of a passing bat's wing.

There was something eerie about the stillness as the two figures turned into the long and but little frequented "Beech Avenue." The silence was presently broken by the faint sound of horses' hoofs trotting, coming towards them, nearer and nearer, and then a high dogcart came in sight, drawn by a spanking bay mare, and driven by Gordon Holroyd, who was returning from some local steeplechases in a condition that his groom who sat behind with folded arms, subsequently expressed as "uncommonly fresh."

Gordon was late, which accounted for his coming home by the little used north or beech avenue. Gordon had, to a certain extent, drowned care—had forgotten his crimes, his sick father, and his debts. He had won some money, he had drunk a quantity of champagne, he was exhilarated by the quick drive through the cool evening air.

He puffed at his cigar, he flicked his free-going horse, he cast his eyes casually round. Those old beeches were no much money wasted—sunk. He would cut down every blessed tree. His father was in a precarious state; he had not spoken since his stroke, his right hand was quite withered and powerless. He was practically dead.

Musing thus fitfully, Gordon's eyes fell on a figure, a figure seated on a log at the edge of the drive. Figure of a woman, figure of a girl—the girl he had left to starve!

Yes, the moon shone directly on her face as it was turned towards him. Oh, what a white, worn face! Oh, what a pair of dark, accusing eyes!—eyes that would haunt him for ever! He dared not look again! With a smothered imprecation he suddenly lashed the mare into a gallop, and tore up the remainder of the avenue as if a legion of fiends were in pursuit.

Trembling and perfectly sobered, he said, as he descended and threw the reins to his astonished groom,—

"Did you see it, Green?"

"See what, sir?"

"Why that thing, that figure in the avenue?"

"No, sir, I saw nothing!" said the servant. "I was too much taken up, striving to hold on, you started off that quick. If I may make bold, sir, you had best not try that game on again with the mare, it ain't safe! She'd done her five-and-twenty miles to-day and was pretty sober; but only for that," and he shook his head emphatically.

"Rubbish! That mare would never run away with me!" and to himself as he walked up the steps, "There are worse things than runaway mares! I'll clear out of this to-morrow!"

(To be continued.)

A COMPARISON of the average height of men in various trades and professions in different countries brings out the fact that the English, as a nation, are the tallest men in the world. It has been found that the English professional classes, who are the tallest adult males, average 5ft. 9in. Next on the list come the males of all classes in the United States. Most European nations average for the adult male, 5ft. 6in., but the Austrians, Spaniards, and Portuguese fall a trifle short of this standard.



"I HAVE COME TO ENGLAND SOLELY TO FIND YOU, AND ASK YOUR HELP," SAID SIR GODFREY'S FELLOW PASSENGER.

JACK NORTH'S SECRET.

—201—

CHAPTER IV.

SIR GODFREY NORTH reached London by eleven o'clock on the Monday after his conversation with Julia, and drove straight to Mr. Carleton's office; but here disappointment awaited him—the lawyer was in Yorkshire, and not expected back until the following day.

"Will you see Mr. Ashton, sir, our managing clerk?" suggested the youth who had admitted Sir Godfrey.

"No, I won't," said the Baronet, rather out of temper. "Just give me a sheet of paper, and I'll write to Mr. Carleton. See that the note's sent on to him."

It was a lovely summer's day, and London in June has many attractions; but Sir Godfrey was not in the mood to enjoy them. He was a man whose mind moved slowly, but who, when he had once resolved to do a thing, liked to get it accomplished as soon as possible.

He never thought of going home. The carriage was ordered to meet the six-thirty train, and he did not care to alter the arrangement. He walked leisurely down the Strand, and presently turned into his club, which was near Pall Mall. He lunched there, read the papers, had a chat with one or two old cronies, and the afternoon ebbed pleasantly away till it was time to go to the station.

The train was an express, only stopping once between London and Ashleigh. Sir Godfrey reentered himself in a corner and hoped no one would disturb his solitude.

But just as they were on the point of starting, the door was flung open, and a lady, very fashionably attired, and with a handsome travelling bag, got into the compartment.

She was an English woman, but had travelled so much abroad as to have a foreign air. Her dress was more elaborate than was suited to a lonely train journey; the scent of a heavy

perfume was exhaled from her garments, and the bright golden hair waved in front in a tasteful fringe owed its charming colour to art.

"She must be fifty if she's a day," was Sir Godfrey's secret reflection. "Well, I am glad that Susan, with all her faults, has not taken to trick herself out like her own daughter."

But he was a very polite old man, and when the lady complained of the draught he drew up one of the windows as attentively as though she had been the youthful beauty she wished to appear.

"I have not been in England for some years," she told him, "and I am only here now on a painful matter of business. Ah, sir, it's hard for a woman to be left alone in the world without her natural protector."

Sir Godfrey did not like her communicative mood at all, but he could hardly ask her not to talk to him; the train would not stop for over half-an-hour, and so it was impossible to change his carriage.

"Most of us have troubles of some sort," he said, rather gruffly.

"And you think we should keep them to ourselves," the lady replied, with a smile. "I am sorry, I was about to ask a great favour of you, and now I feel discouraged."

"I think it is never wise to ask a favour of a stranger," said the baronet, stiffly.

"But this was a very simple one. I think I shall venture on it in spite of your reproof. I see by your ticket (it was lying on the window-ledge) that you are going to Ashleigh. Do you know the neighbourhood well?"

"I ought to. I was born within five miles of the town, and I have lived there all my life."

"How very interesting! Then I shall ask my favour boldly. Can you tell me what sort of a man Sir Godfrey North is?"

The Baronet started. Was it possible that she suspected his identity. No, she looked in serious earnest. What in the world could this overdressed foreign-looking stranger want with him.

"I know Sir Godfrey," he answered,

guardedly. "Indeed, I may say I know him well."

"And his nephew?"

"And his nephew also."

"I am most anxious to see Sir Godfrey," said the lady. "His nephew has treated me shamefully, and I have come to England to ask his uncle's help."

The veins in Sir Godfrey's forehead stood out like thick purple cords. He was furious with rage.

"Woman!" he cried, hoarsely, "you are lying. I am Godfrey North, of Ashcroft, and I tell you my nephew is the soul of honour!"

"You may think him so—but if you knew all you would change your mind."

"Nothing would shake my trust in Jack—nothing destroy my faith in him. Tell me your story. Tell me every charge you can bring against him, and I will disprove them all."

She answered rapidly in an undertone. Sir Godfrey's face blanched as he listened to her.

"I don't believe it."

"Then read this," and she pushed into his hand a legal-looking document. "I have come to England solely to find you, and ask your help. Why should two defenceless women be crushed and ruined by your nephew?"

"Hush!" his voice had a ring of command.

"I still tell you I do not believe your charge; but it shall be investigated to the last syllable. My lawyer is coming down this week, and I will send for John."

"And you will do us justice?"

"If your charge is true you shall have justice at any cost. And now, having seen me, you will hardly care to continue your journey. If you get out at the next station you will soon find a train back to London."

"And I have your promise to search into this?"

"You have my word," he answered, gravely, "a word that never yet was broken."

She got out, and the train went on. It was perhaps ten minutes before it reached Ashleigh,

and a sensation was created by a porter's discovering Sir Godfrey lying on the floor of the carriage, as he supposed, in a fit.

The guard, when questioned later on, declared that Sir Godfrey was perfectly well when the train left London. He was alone in the compartment reading the newspaper. The official honestly believed what he said, for Sir Godfrey's mysterious fellow-passenger had entered the carriage literally when the train was on the point of starting.

The Baronet was well known at Ashleigh, and the porter, quickly getting assistance, the unconscious form was lifted up and carried into one of the waiting-rooms, while a messenger was dispatched for Dr. Hunt, whose house was only ten minutes walk from the station.

Fortunately the doctor was at home, and came promptly to the scene. He looked at his old friend and patient, just put one hand to his heart, and then gave his verdict. No human skill could avail; Sir Godfrey had gone to meet his Maker.

"But he was quite well," exclaimed the station-master, in amazement. "I saw him this morning as he got into the train, and I never saw him look better."

"He suffered from heart-disease," said Dr. Hunt; "in fact, I attended him for it, but I never apprehended such a sudden end. I should think he must have sustained some terrible shock."

"There was a paper in the carriage," said the porter. "Looked as though it had just fallen from his hand. Could Sir Godfrey have seen bad news in it?"

But no one accepted this theory. The Baronet was not engaged in business or speculation, and so no pecuniary disaster could touch him, while he had so few relations that it seemed impossible he could see bad news of any one he loved in the public Press. The paper had not been secured, so no one could search it to see if it contained anything likely to disturb the dead man's peace. Indeed, from the very first, both friends and strangers dismissed the idea of any sudden shock having brought about the end; every one thought that the fatigue of a long day in London had been too much for Sir Godfrey, and the heart's action had suddenly failed.

"The carriage is waiting, sir," said one of the porters to Dr. Hunt. "It's a mercy the ladies from Ashcroft didn't come in it."

"I will take him home and break the news to them," said the doctor; "at least, they will be spared the pain and publicity of an inquest. The fact that I attended Sir Godfrey for heart-disease, and that he has died from the same complaint, will be sufficient to spare them that."

It was a sad, impressive scene. All those who took part in it had known the dead man well. Sir Godfrey was not a great traveller. For the last twenty years he had spent eleven months out of every twelve at his country seat, and had driven into Ashleigh at least two or three times a week. Only that morning he had started in the best of health, and now, he would never speak to them again.

The coachman and footman received the sad burden with troubled faces. The former, who had grown grey in his master's service, made but one remark.

"If only Mr. John were at home!" The footman, who was younger and had less of feudal attachment for the family, wondered to himself if the establishment at Ashcroft would be reduced, and his own services no longer required.

Doctors are used to sad sights and painful tasks, but that drive to Ashcroft was a very trying experience for Dr. Hunt. He had attended Sir Godfrey for years, and was his friend as well as doctor. He stopped the brougham before they reached the lodge gates and got out.

"Give me a few minutes time to break the news before you go on. If the ladies see the carriage drive up they may come out into the hall to meet Sir Godfrey, for it is so late that they must be growing anxious."

They were indeed, for as the butler opened the door Julia ran forward to meet Dr. Hunt, only to utter a cry of dismay.

"Mother, it is not grandpapa after all."

Dr. Hunt said a few words to the butler, and then he took the ladies back to the drawing-room. He said afterwards he never knew how he accomplished his task.

"It will comfort you," he concluded, "to know that Sir Godfrey must have died without any struggle, almost without any pain. I had attended him for some time for heart-disease, and I feel sure that caused his death."

"He was quite well this morning," said Julia, sadly.

"Must there be an inquest!" demanded her mother. "It will be most distressing."

There were sounds of an arrival. Dr. Hunt had purposely closed the drawing-room door; he did not want Julia to see the sad procession that carried the dead master of Ashcroft upstairs.

"Now, what can I do for you?" asked the doctor of Mrs. Seaton. "I must return to Ashleigh. Can I send any telegrams for you? Is there nothing I can undertake?"

Mrs. Seaton was perplexed. "I really don't know what to do, Dr. Hunt. Sir Godfrey was most reserved. I have no idea of the contents of his will."

"If you take my advice, you will let me wire for his lawyer and John North; they will take all trouble off your hands, and as I hear John is to be your son-in-law, your interests must be identical."

"There is nothing settled," said Mrs. Seaton, diplomatically; she began to think that if Julia were the heiress she could do better than marry Jack.

Dr. Hunt called at Mr. Fane's, thinking he might know John North's address, and that was why the telegram was despatched which so startled Doris Fane.

It happened that Mr. Carleton returned from Yorkshire on the Monday evening, and he was at his office the next morning when the telegram from Ashleigh arrived. He had, indeed, but just opened Sir Godfrey's letter, which requested him to go to Ashcroft at once, and make the Baronet's will, as circumstances had led him to destroy the old one.

Dr. Hunt's telegram was short and impressive: "Sir Godfrey North dead; his nephew away; come at once."

"Dead!"—and the lawyer actually groaned—"and I have it in his own handwriting that he destroyed his will. What in the world is to be done if John North is away? He is the next heir, and no one else can act."

He pulled himself up suddenly—was Jack the next heir after all! The lawyer was old enough to remember Doris North's romantic marriage; she had survived the elopement some years. Was there any proof that she had died childless?

Dr. Hunt was waiting on the platform when the lawyer's train reached Ashleigh station.

"Come and lunch with me; then I'll drive you out to Ashcroft. This is an awful business."

"Dreadful! I wish to goodness I had been in London yesterday when Sir Godfrey called at the office."

"You mean you did not see him?"

"I was in Yorkshire; it's the merest fluke I got back late last night."

After lunch the two men drew their chairs nearer to each other and began to talk of the dead master of Ashcroft.

"Things are at a dead-lock if John North is the heir, for no one knows where he is. I suppose you drew up the will and know who are the executors?"

"There is no will."

The doctor started from his chair.

"No will! You must have been mad to let him neglect to make one."

"He made his will right enough years ago, but I have a letter in my pocket which he wrote at my office yesterday, and in it he distinctly states he has destroyed his will, and wants me to draw up another."

"But what induced him to destroy it?"

"I can't say; but if he had left another I should have been heartily thankful to know the first was destroyed."

"You mean it was unjust?"

"It inflicted a cruel injury on the survivors. He left everything to Miss Seaton and John

North on condition that they were married within three months of his death, or of the lady's twenty-first birthday. If either refused, the fortune went to various charities."

"I looked on the young people as good as engaged, and now I suppose Jack takes everything as heir-at-law? It comes a little hard on the Seaton."

"I'm not so sure. If Doris North left a child, that child takes Ashcroft—the estate and money."

"And Jack?"

"Jack, in that case, has nothing, except the three hundred a year Sir Godfrey settled on him when he came of age."

"And the Seaton's?"

"They are quite out of it. You see they are no blood relation to Sir Godfrey."

"In that case they are out of their suspense!"

"Not quite! If Jack is the heir, and marries Julia, they will do very well."

Mrs. Seaton received the gentlemen when they reached Ashcroft. She looked horribly uneasy. The will was not in Sir Godfrey's desk. She supposed Mr. Carleton had it in safe keeping. Her anger and surprise when she heard the truth knew no bounds.

"He ought to be ashamed of himself," she cried, "to deceive us so!"

"Hush!" said Mr. Carleton, sternly. "Madam, in my presence, you shall not revile the dead. Sir Godfrey was most generous to you in life; and had he lived to make another will, I feel sure it would have provided for you and your child. As it is—"

"As it is Jack takes everything!"

"I think not."

"He must. He is the next of kin."

"I believe myself that Doris North left a child," said the lawyer, gravely.

"Doris! Why, she made some disgraceful marriage; her husband was a tutor, and his relations only working people."

"I shall make a thorough search among Sir Godfrey's papers, and no doubt I shall come across some letters from his daughter."

"He destroyed them all," said Mrs. Seaton, bitterly, "and richly she deserved it."

Dr. Hunt looked disgusted; Mr. Carleton, though quite as much revolted at this display of unwomanly malice, yet managed to command his feelings, and appealed to what he felt was the widow's most vulnerable point—self-interest.

"If Doris North's child is alive it will be found," he said, very gravely. "And there is no doubt that any assistance you give us in the search would be amply recompensed. A young girl or a lad of twenty could not live at Ashcroft alone. Some arrangements might be made, at any rate for a time, for your continuing to preside over the establishment, of course with a satisfactory honorarium."

Mrs. Seaton pressed her lips together.

"I could not make common cause with the enemy of my son-in-law. Dear Jack always loved Julia, and he will not forsake her in her hour of poverty. I shall fight for his rights to the bitter end against the usurper you propose to bring forward."

The door opened just then and Julia Seaton came in; her eyes were red with weeping, and she looked quite overcome with grief. She went up to the lawyer.

"I heard you were here, Mr. Carleton, and I came down because I want very much to ask you something."

"My dear," he answered, gravely, "I shall be only too glad to do anything I can for you."

"Did you see grandpapa yesterday?"

"No; I missed him, unhappily."

"Well, I think I know what he wanted to say to you. He told me on Sunday not to mention it to anyone; but I feel sure he would not mind my telling you now."

"Go on, my dear," said Mr. Carleton, kindly. "I am sure you are doing right."

"It would be far better if she consulted her own mother," said Mrs. Seaton, bitterly. "Julia, I consider your conduct most unbecoming."

But Julia took no notice. Perhaps she did not hear; her eyes never left Mr. Carleton's face.

"I can't explain it to you, only I am quite, quite sure of what I say. Grandpapa went to see you to ask you to find his daughter's child and bring her home to Ashcroft."

Amusement was written on every face, and consternation on Mrs. Seaton's, for this statement seemed to settle the point beyond a doubt. Doris North had left a daughter, and she would be the sole heiress of Ashcroft and its revenues.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN John North left Norton-street with a heavy heart, he knew that a long journey lay before him. He wrote vaguely to Sir Godfrey that he would be home "next week," but in his own mind he thought if he acted wisely he should not return to Ashcroft at all. For all time he was burdened with a secret, and he could keep it better away from the old man who loved him.

He caught the boat-train that Saturday evening and reached Paris early on Sunday morning. Many a man would have stayed at home and tried to persuade himself the letter he had shown Denis Fane was false; but John North preferred to know the worst; he could bear anything in the world better than suspense.

In the afternoon a visitor called at the hotel and asked for "Mr. North." He must have come by appointment for Jack seemed to expect him.

"Sit down, Antoine," he said, pointing to a chair, "and let us come to the bottom of this miserable business. I only got your letter three days ago; it had been travelling for a fortnight!"

The stranger, who was a middle-aged Frenchman, took the chair respectfully. Beyond a strong foreign accent, he spoke English perfectly. He was a sort of superior valet, and had rather an impulsive affection for the young Englishman when in his service.

"I am sorry, sir," he said, simply. "Mrs. Morris is no longer in Paris."

"I did not want to see her," said Jack, with a shudder. "You can tell me all I want to know. I came as soon as I could after I had your letter. I trust you fully, so now tell me everything, just as it happened."

Antoine nodded.

"It was a few days before I wrote to you, sir, I was walking on one of the boulevards, when I met Mrs. Morris face to face; she looked up suddenly and our eyes met. She turned deadly white, sir, and shivered, though it was a hot summer's day. It seemed to me that she was frightened; though why should she fear a servant? I stopped and asked respectfully after Miss Blanche, but she would hardly answer. She called a *fiacre* and was driven away."

"You know, Antoine, that as my servant you would have very painful associations for Mrs. Morris."

"I know, sir, but I never liked Mrs. Morris—never. I can never forgive the wrong she did you. It seemed to me from her white face she was plotting more harm, and I have my feelings. I did not like the scornful way she treated me, so I resolved not to lose sight of her. I also took a *fiacre* and followed her. I discovered she and Miss Blanche were staying at a grand boarding-house near the Champs-Élysées."

"The next day I went back. I found an English maid whom I had met when travelling, and she told me that Mrs. and Miss Morris were to have stayed till August, but that the day before Madame had received bad news and left suddenly."

"You mean she left because she met you?"

"She may have thought I was still in your service, sir, and that you, too, were in Paris. The maid I spoke of, sir, was at the *pension* with her mistress, a lady who did not like Mrs. Morris. It was she who told me what I wrote to you."

"And you think it is true?"

"Sir, I am sure of it. I have been to the place myself; you can do so too."

Jack sighed. He was only twenty-seven, and the news Antoine gave him blighted his whole life; his face looked pinched and worn in the summer sunshine.

The Frenchman looked at him pityingly.

"I did not know the best to do," he said, relapsing into his foreign idiom as he did when excited. "I thought, sir, first, I would keep what I had discovered in my own heart. Monsieur I thought was in his own land. The past was for him only an evil dream. Why should I remind him of his trouble?"

"You were right to send the letter, Antoine," said Mr. North, firmly, "and I am grateful to you. Now give me the address."

"That of Mrs. Morris? Sir, I know it not."

"No, the other."

"It is a big house in the country, three miles from Crécy station. The garden is large, and shut in by high walls—but monsieur can see for himself as I did."

"I can't understand their motive," said Jack, speaking more to himself than to Antoine. "It seems to me unfathomable. Why tell me a lie which entailed on them a heavy expense, and—"

The little Frenchman interrupted him.

"Ah, sir, Miss Blanche is beautiful, and Mrs. Morris hopes she will make a great match. Better a dead sorrow than a living one. Besides, Mrs. Morris always hated you, sir; she would stand at little that could hurt you."

Jack wrote down the two addresses Antoine gave him. One was that of the fashionable *pension* where Mrs. Morris had stayed, and where he might hear of her present whereabouts; the other that of the lonely house near Crécy. Then he pressed a bank-note in Antoine's hand.

"I can trust you to be silent!"

"Silent as the grave, sir."

Left alone Jack North rang for a French time-table and hunted up Crécy. He found it to be a small town about an hour's journey from Paris. It was too late to go there to-night; he must wait till the morning.

But it was not too late to call at the *pension* near the Champs-Élysées. Antoine had told him the proprietress was English. He hoped she had no insular objection to Sunday visits.

He found Mrs. Clavering a pleasant, cultured woman of middle age. She received him with *empressement*. Perhaps the card told her the position he held in England, or else his aristocratic bearing impressed her.

"I have ventured to ask your aid on a very important matter, madam," said Jack, simply. "You have lately had among your guests Mrs. and Miss Morris. Can you give me their present address?"

"I wish I could," she said, frankly. "The fact is, Mr. North, I want it myself. They have treated me abominably. I trust they are no friends of yours, for in my opinion they are just a couple of adventurers."

"They are my enemies rather than my friends," he answered; "the mother did me a cruel wrong. I have reason to suspect she is meditating another."

"I will tell you all I know about them," said Mrs. Clavering; "it is not much. Mrs. Morris came here at Easter, and said she wanted a home for several months. She boasted a great deal of her connections and her power to introduce other visitors. Finally, I took her and her daughter on very reduced terms."

"The first month she paid me to the day; the next she asked me to wait until she received remittances from England. I had begun to think of speaking seriously to her about the delay when she came to me in tears, saying she had heard of the dangerous illness of her husband's brother, from whom her daughter had great expectations. She must take Blanche to him at once. He had sent her a cheque for fifty pounds. Would I deduct my account, with a month's payment, instead of notice, and give her the balance."

"Mr. North her manner would have deceived anyone. I believed her implicitly. I told her a week's notice was ample. I gave her a receipt in full, and nearly thirty pounds in gold. They left by the night-bus, and it was only the next day I remembered I did not know their English address or the name of the relation to whose death-bed they were hastening. I paid the cheque—it was on a well-known London Bank—

into my own account. Four days later I was informed it had been returned from England—dishonoured. I have lost fifty pounds through Mrs. Morris, more than half the sum having been paid to her in hard cash."

"You make me feel ashamed of my nation," said Jack. "Pray do not imagine I am an accomplice of Mrs. Morris if I offer to refund what she has robbed you of. I have not seen her for more than two years. I hope never to see her again, but—for a little while I believed in her implicitly, and so I would like to undo a little of her mischief. I have not fifty pounds in my purse, but before I leave Paris I will procure French bank-notes for that sum and send them to you."

"But, indeed, Mr. North, this is munificent. I never thought—"

"I can spare the money," he interrupted her. "If you think you will be in my debt you can more than recompense me by answering a few questions. Will you tell me frankly all you know of these women?"

"And gladly—but it is very little; they were most reserved. I gathered more from their conduct than their words. I believe Mrs. Morris had a very small income, and that she recklessly exceeded it in her efforts to secure a husband for Blanche."

"And Blanche is pretty—she was very pretty as a child."

"She is lovely," confessed Mrs. Clavering, "and sometimes I used to think she was made of different stuff to her mother."

"Was she the only child?"

"Yes; there had been another, but she died. I think there was some disgrace connected with her. Blanche told me once her mother had forbidden her ever to speak of her sister."

"I will only ask one more question. Did you ever hear Mrs. Morris speak of Crécy?"

"Yes; she went there twice while she was here. I remember her going out twice for the day, and leaving Blanche here. Blanche told me she thought Crécy had some mysterious attraction for her mother, for she was always going there, and she insisted always on going alone."

John North rose.

"I thank you a hundred times. As soon as I can get a cheque cashed I will send the fifty pounds."

"A charming man," was Mrs. Clavering's verdict; "but what on earth can he have to do with that odious Mrs. Morris!"

The beautiful summer sunshine seemed almost a mockery to John North the next day as he drove from Crécy station to the house so graphically described by Antoine. He found to his surprise that the proprietor of the castle—as the villagers called it—was English, and a retired physician. Jack sent in his card, with a request that Dr. Matland would see him on urgent private business.

He was ushered into a large, cheerful room, with four large windows opening on to the garden. Sitting down near one of these, he had a view of the lawn, and could see one or two feminine figures flitting to and fro. Some nameless impulse made him advance nearer the window and look out. The scene was peaceable enough, only a group of girls clustered round an elderly woman who was reading aloud, but the sight struck Jack North a terrible blow; a sharp pain went through his heart as he turned from the window to meet Dr. Matland, who entered with many apologies for his delay.

CHAPTER VI.

DR. HUNT and Mr. Carleton were equally surprised at Julia's strange speech. They knew that Mrs. Seaton was half beside herself with anger, but they could not miss the opportunity of finding out all that her daughter could tell them.

"My dear," said the lawyer, kindly, "will you tell us exactly what makes you think this?"

"Julia is half distracted with grief," put in her mother; "she does not know what she is saying."

"Yes I do know, please mamma," returned Julia; "it was coming home from church on Sunday grandpapa asked me if he brought an orphan girl to me here whether I would be kind to her. He said she had not had any advantages, and that she might prove very backward and uneducated; but that he should like her to come here, and for me to try and help her to feel at home. He said I was not to say anything to mother or anyone, but that when he came home from London he would tell me all about his plans."

She paused a moment, and then went on,—

"When I heard of Doris North and her rash marriage, I felt positive the girl grandpapa meant to bring here was her daughter."

"And I feel sure you are right," said Mr. Carleton, gravely, "besides being very grateful to you for your confidence. Now, Miss Julia, it seems that Sir Godfrey trusted you with one of his secrets. Did he by any chance mention another? Have you any idea how he intended to dispose of his property?"

Julia blushed crimson.

"Must I answer you?"

"Of course you must answer, Julia," said her mother, eagerly. "If your grandfather expressed any intentions to you, they might stand instead of a will."

Mr. Carleton knew better, but he never contradicted her.

"My dear young lady," he said to Julia, "I have no wish to pain or embarrass you, but we are in a great difficulty. Sir Godfrey destroyed his will recently, and we have no idea what caused him to do so."

"I believe I did."

"You!" Mother, lawyer and doctor stared at her, and poor Julia's cheeks grew redder still, while her eyes sank beneath their scrutiny.

"It is horrid to have to talk of it," she said, indignantly; "but on Saturday night grandpapa said something to me about my cousin, and his own wish that Jack and I—"

"That Jack and you should marry," said Dr. Hunt, coming to her relief; "we all know that wish was very near his heart."

"I told my grandfather," went on the girl, gently, "that my cousin and I were too much like brother and sister to become anything else. That I was quite sure of my own mind, and believed Jack thought as I did. Grandpapa was very kind. He said it was a disappointment to him, but that he would never try to make me unhappy. He mentioned that he had always hoped Ashcroft would be my home and Jack's after he was dead, but that now, of course, he must make other arrangements. He did not leave the library again that evening, and he told me he should be busy looking over some papers."

"He destroyed the will then," said Mr. Carleton, in a tone of conviction. "As it left Ashcroft to John North, on condition of his marriage with you, Miss Julia, you will see that after your confidence Sir Godfrey would feel bound to alter his intentions."

"And it is your doing that we are beggars!" cried Mrs. Seaton, angrily. "But for your miserable folly this beautiful old place would be my home for life. Now I shall have to turn out and end my days in poky lodgings!"

Julia bore her mother's reproaches very meekly. As for the two gentlemen, their sympathies were entirely on the poor girl's side. They would gladly have been spared any further dealings with Mrs. Seaton; but, alas! things had to be arranged, and she insisted on a voice in the discussion. Finally Mr. Carleton decided that he would place all Sir Godfrey's private papers under lock and seal, and not attempt to examine them until after the funeral, which he fixed for Saturday, in the hope that Jack North would be home by then. Notices of Sir Godfrey's death would appear in all the London newspapers of Wednesday; surely he would see the announcement and hurry back to Ashcroft.

Julia shivered when the door closed on the lawyer and Doctor Hunt. She felt certain her mother would break into a torrent of angry reproaches, but Mrs. Seaton seemed for the time to have conquered her temper.

"You have acted very foolishly, child," she said, sadly, "and it may ruin us; but it is not

too late to try and repair your mistake. I feel convinced that there is no living child of Doris North, so when Sir John asks you to be his wife, you have only to accept him, and all will be well."

"Sir John!" Of course it was Jack's rightful title now, but somehow it struck on Julia with a chill. It seemed as though his new honours removed her old playmate very far from her.

"Jack does not care for me, mother."

"I don't think he does," said Mrs. Seaton, with an astonishing frankness. "I believe he lost his heart to someone abroad whom he could not marry. I do not mean that your cousin will be a rapturous lover, but he is fond of you in his way, and he has come to the age when a man thinks of settling down. Then Jack was always romantically generous, and when he finds that you have nothing and he takes everything he will be quite willing to offer you the only compensation in his power."

Julia shuddered.

"Didn't you love papa when you married him, mother?" she asked, reproachfully.

"That has nothing to do with the present case," retorted Mrs. Seaton. "I believe that John North is now the master of Ashcroft, and that with a little encouragement he will propose to you."

"If he does I shall refuse him!"

"Why?"

"Because I do not love him."

"Rubbish!"

"Marriage is for all time," said Julia, very slowly. "Nothing can free people from it but death or dishonour. I am only twenty-two, mother. I may have fifty years to live. Fancy spending them tied to a husband I did not love!"

"You are very fond of John. You care for him quite enough."

Julia shook her head.

"I don't expect I shall ever marry at all," she said, slowly, "but if I do it must be someone who loves me with all his heart."

The life poor Julia led between her grandfather's death and funeral was terrible. Mrs. Seaton was tearful and reproachful, angry, piteous and vindictive by turns. It was an intense relief to her daughter when a telegram arrived from Jack, handed in at the Paris office, which quite explained his silence,—

"Only just heard terrible news. Crossing to-night, home early to-morrow."

When Jack reached home the next day he looked ten years older than when they had last seen him. Mrs. Seaton purposely left the cousins alone, perhaps in the hope that they would become lover-like over their mutual sorrow, but if so the hope was fruitless.

"Oh, Jill," said Jack, simply, "we've both lost the best friend we had in the world."

He had not called her Jill for many a year; not since the old childish days when the cousins were "Jack and Jill" to all their friends. Then they talked of Sir Godfrey's unknown grandchild, and Julia found Jack quite took her view.

"I don't deny, Jill, I should have liked to be master of Ashcroft, but his own grandchild had the best claim on him, and apart from that he did plenty for us in his lifetime, whilst most likely she never even knew she had a grandfather."

"Mother declares she must be dead, because nothing has been heard of her for years."

Sir John shook his head.

"No, I have a conviction she will come and reign at Ashcroft. I only hope she won't be very terrible."

"Doris North's child must be a lady."

"Ah, but Doris has been dead for years, and this girl has been brought up by her father's family. We may be thankful, Jill, if she doesn't prove a buxom young woman of the 'Arriet type.'"

"And she must be mistress of Ashcroft!"

"Well, the best thing that could happen would be for your mother to stay on here as caretaker to the heiress. I believe in a year or two she might turn her out quite a presentable young woman."

It was a great relief to Mr. Carleton to find Jack at Ashcroft when he came down for the funeral. Sir John went to the point at once. He fully believed Sir Godfrey's grandchild was alive. He thought the best plan would be for Mrs. Seaton to remain at Ashcroft and initiate the heiress into her new life. He himself would undertake the agency of the estate if Mr. Carleton, as his uncle's lawyer, would give it him.

"I wonder you are willing to take it, but of course it is yours. If Mrs. Seaton will really look after the heiress it will be a boon."

"I say," broke in Jack, "wouldn't it be easier to speak of the young person by her name?"

"Yes, but I don't know it."

"Not know it—but you were my uncle's lawyer!"

"Only of late years. My father was to the fore at the time of Miss North's marriage. I was out of health and took a six months' holiday, spending it in a voyage to the Antipodes. When I came back my father told me briefly Doris North had eloped with a penniless tutor, and I must never mention her name to Sir Godfrey."

"Then how are we to find her child?"

"I intend to search Sir Godfrey's papers carefully for some clue. If that fails I must advertise, offering a reward for the certificate of Doris North's marriage. I know that it took place in the June of 1870, and most probably in London."

(To be continued.)

HER BETTER SELF.

—23—

(Continued from page 79.)

What was wrong! He had hoped so much from this marriage—hoped she would grow to love him passionately—and instead a something, something intangible, seemed to be growing up between them.

Noble and generous, he soon began to torture himself with doubts. Ought he, a man past his first youth, have married such a young creature? Was it possible she was realising that she had made a mistake now, when it was too late, and he could not release her? Was he distasteful to her! These thoughts tortured him, and soon showed plainly in his sad face and drooping lips.

Annette saw these signs, and strove to exert herself to please him and repay all his tender care and kindness; but the passionate love he craved for was not there, and he grew more dispirited day by day.

She urged him to amuse himself with field sports, hoping that would employ and divert him; and after Christmas, when the frost broke up, he hunted several days a week, and in hard and reckless riding found some relief for his vexed spirit.

One bright February day, when he returned from a day with the Doil hounds, he brought with him a friend, in whom Annette trembled to recognise Rowland Leale.

"An old friend, Annette," said her husband, cheerily. "We must do our best to entertain him, for he has promised to make the Royal his home for some time."

The girl managed to murmur something; but her face was dyed in blushes, and the hand she was obliged to extend trembled in the Captain's like an aspen leaf.

He was perfectly cool, and uttered a few common-places nonchalantly, while she wondered how he dared come there—wondered at his audacity in coming under her husband's roof, and shrank from the prospect of meeting him daily.

This wore off after a time; for the Captain, finding he had a comfortable billet, and knowing the honesty and virtue of the girl he coveted, was circumspect and cautious, and only commonly attentive. Still her blushings and tremblings, and shy, downcast looks when he approached miled him somewhat, and were a sore trial and temptation to him.

He kept a tight hand over himself. Till one unlucky day, early in April, as he was returning from a walk, he came upon Mrs. Drummond sitting on a mass of rock on the shore, looking out seaward.

The tears glistened in the violet eyes. There was a wistful yearning expression on the beautiful face, and her sudden start as he appeared, followed by blushes and shy tremblings, upset his caution altogether.

He could not tell they were caused by shame at the thought of that kiss which had passed between them—that half admission of affection—and being blind and vain, as some men are, he plunged wildly into a confession of love.

"Annette," he said, catching her hand, "you grieve, still you do not grieve alone. Our fate is hard—so hard that it is almost unbearable. Shall we bear it without a struggle?"

"Must we meet as strangers?" he went on, hoarsely, as she remained silent, her eyes fixed on his face with a frightened expression in their soft depths. "Can we not be more?"

"More!" she echoed.

"Yes, more," he whispered, pressing her hand to his breast. "There can be no marriage without love. You are mine, not his. Mine really, his in the face of the world. Give me a sweet assurance, a crumb of hope!"

"Hope!" she echoed again, with a convulsive sob.

"Yes; hope that my martyrdom is at an end, that I may be all in all to you."

"Hush! hush!" she whispered. "If I listen to you how can I look my husband in the face? The man whose name I bear, who trusts me. I should be lost."

"Nay, I do not ask you to leave your home, only love me."

His voice sank, his lips approached her agitated face, his arm was stealing round her waist, when suddenly she drew back and stopped him with a gesture.

"Spare me your insults," she said, proudly.

"Insults!" he muttered, between his clenched teeth, while his cheeks grew dusky red.

"Yes, insults. Have I ever seemed to wish you to forget the respect due to your friend—Keith Drummond's wife?"

"Indirectly, you have."

"Indirectly. How!"

This was asked with an uplifting of the graceful head, an unconscious straightening of the slender throat.

"By the emotion you showed whenever I came into your presence. By blushes, and tremblings and signs no man could mistake."

"And you took those innocent signs of shame at—what once—passed between us—for—signs of a—guilty passion!" she faltered.

"I thought you cared for me," she acknowledged, sullenly.

"I was weak—once," she owned, with humility, "and I strove against it, strove—to do my duty by the—man who has given his name—and honour—into my keeping. Strove to forget—you."

"And—have you succeeded?" he asked, eagerly.

"You have helped me since you have been at Drummond Royal," she answered, with cold sadness. "Daily I have contrasted you with him."

"And found me wanting!" he said, savagely.

"Sadly. I saw how honest, true, and unselfish his love was—how base, mean, and cruel yours."

"You are severe, Mrs. Drummond," biting his lips, fiercely.

"And do you not deserve it? Oh, Heaven! how low I must have fallen in your esteem before you could have dared to speak as you have to me. If you could only know the agony of shame I feel, the remorse to think for one instant I ever put you before my noble Keith, by my unwifely blushes laid myself open to your insults, the shame—the shame overwhelms me," and bursting into deep sobs she sank on the rocks with bowed head, clasping her hands over her eyes to shut out the glow and light of the spring day, the blue dancing waters, the golden sunbeams, the green, waving boughs, and cool, glistening sands. Silence—darkness, where what she craved for in her dire anguish.

Her faith in Leslie was broken, her childish trust betrayed.

She dug a grave and buried her love for him deep down, and she knew that it would never come to life again, that her faith, devotion, and passion were Keith's for evermore.

The wretched man standing before her, shame-stricken and shrinking, felt that he would give the rest of his life for one—only one—glance from her dear eyes, full of the old blind faith and trust.

Yet he knew that never again would the woman he loved gaze back into his eyes with affection or confidence.

He had seen the horror and loathing in her look ere she covered her face, and he felt that he would sooner have died than have lived to face her scorn and contempt. He had made a horrid mistake, which nothing could ever put right; had made her miserable, when in his vanity he thought he was making her happy.

When she could stifle her sobs, with athen cheeks and trembling hands she rose, disdaining the offer of his arm; and in silence, with down-cast head, she turned away, and walked slowly back by the surge-washed shore, he not daring to follow till long afterwards.

That night Mrs. Drummond did not appear at dinner, sending down an excuse by her maid; and the next morning Captain Leslie told Keith that a letter just received called him back to town on pressing and important business.

Keith was sorry to let him go, for he was sincerely attached to this "false friend," and more sorry, a few months later, when he heard that he had fallen at Kirbehan while storming the Kopple with the Black Watch, speared through the heart by an Arab.

Annette was greatly distressed at the news of his death, for though she despised him she was too womanly and tender not to feel regret for his untimely end. Still, she soon forgot him, for her mind was full of other things.

Though she had striven to break down the barrier between herself and her husband, she had failed. She knew not how. Leslie's impassioned words had opened her eyes, shown her how she had mistaken her own heart. What a glamour the fair-faced scoundrel managed to throw over his false actions and words, realised that it was her noble husband to whom her love was really given, whose affection she really longed for.

She was pale and sad when she thought of the great tenderness and attachment she jeopardised; and Keith, mistaking her sad looks and thinking his presence an annoyance to her, and that his absence would be a relief, told her one day that he should go to Egypt.

"What for?" she asked, in amazement.

"To see the fighting, and, perhaps, join in," he rejoined, with unconscious coolness.

"No, no," she cried, running over to him, and clasping his arm with her hands, "you must not, shall not go to that dreadful place. You might be killed."

"Would you care much, little wife, if I were?" he queried, looking wistfully at the beautiful up-turned face.

"So much," she replied, with quivering lips and tear-dimmed eyes, "that I should die too."

"Is it possible, then, that you really care for me?" he cried, joyfully.

"I love you with my whole heart and soul," she answered with passionate fervour.

"Thank Heaven!" he murmured, gratefully, as he clasped her in his arms. "At last my own, own wife."

"Yours till death parts us," she whispered, fondly, laying her head on his breast.

[THE END.]

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THE SECRET OF THE MINE.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE impulse was strong upon Pauline to turn and fly, but she could only stare with fascinated eyes at the man who approached the spot where she stood.

As he reached the landing, he saw her standing there in her bridal robes, her face blanched to the hue of death.

He stopped short, and for one awful moment they looked at each other.

"How long have you been standing there?" he cried, excitedly.

Again she tried to speak, but the words froze on her lips.

"You saw all that transpired!" he hissed, in the same awful voice.

"Yes," she answered, recoiling still further from him.

A terrible imprecation broke from his lips.

"What are you going to do about it?" he demanded.

"I am going back to the people in the drawing-room, fall at the minister's feet, and cry out for him to save me."

"You will do nothing of the kind!" he hissed, clutching at her arm, white throat. "You shall never leave this spot alive unless you swear never to betray me!"

"I will die first!" cried the girl.

He laughed a horrible, mocking laugh.

"Life is sweet to most of us," he said; adding:

"If you wouldn't have the sin of a double murder on my hands, you will speak, and speak quickly." She struggled desperately to free herself. The beautiful bridal veil was ruthlessly torn, and round the slender throat there were crimson streaks, plainly showing the marks of his hands.

"Swear it, or I will murder you, and then give the story of your father's crime to the world."

"You dare not, because I—I have married you to—keep our contract."

He loosened his hold upon her white throat for one instant.

"Of what benefit would it be for you to—to betray me?" he cried. "No wife can testify against her husband. That is the law of the land. You would not be believed, I tell you."

She knew he was right. It was for a wife to shield the man she married, not to betray him, no matter what he had done.

"Do you promise?" he cried.

And once more the awful grip of those talon-like fingers fastened about her throat.

Another moment of pressure and the life would be out of her body.

She knew that he meant what he said. He would surely kill her unless she bound herself to silence.

She tried to cry out for help, but he held her the tighter.

She realised that he meant to carry out his threat to kill her.

"I—I promise!" she gasped, reeling backward.

"You are very wise," he retorted, releasing his hold. "You have saved yourself from the fate of that fool down yonder. Now go. Retire to your room as quickly as possible, and array yourself in your travelling costume, and never return to this matter again—never ask to know the reason of it. What you don't know won't hurt you. That is my unfortunate affair, not yours."

He turned and retraced his steps, leaving Pauline to grope back the way she had come. He did not know that she had scarcely taken one step forward ere she fell in a heap on the landing.

Searching for her half an hour later, Mrs. Peters found her lying unconscious upon the upper landing, her bridal-gown torn in shreds, and great purple marks about her neck and wrists.

For an instant Mrs. Peters gazed with horror too great for words.

Her first impulse was to cry out for help and to summon everyone to the spot, but with second thought came discretion.

No, no; the guests must not know what had happened. Lifting her by main strength, she carried her to her own room and laid her on the

couch. She removed with trembling hands the wedding gown all flecked with drops of blood.

"Great Heaven! what can have happened! Has Pauline fallen and hurt herself!"

She could find no marks upon her save those streaks of purple about the neck and wrists.

Pouring a draught of brandy between the white lips, she soon had the satisfaction of seeing the dark eyes open, but as they did so, the girl cried out,—

"In Heaven's name do not murder me, for you will then have twocrimes to answer for, Maurice Fairfax."

Mrs. Peters drew back trembling like a leaf. Pauline started back, looking in dazed wonder about her.

Then her eyes fell upon her torn wedding-dress, and she shrank back amongst the pillows, with such a terrified cry that Mrs. Peters thought she was losing her reason.

Suddenly she clutched her aunt's arm, and hurrying her face in her breast, she begged her to tell her what had happened.

"That is just what I should like to ask of you," returned the good woman, anxiously. "I found you lying insensible on the dark stair-way, with the marks of violence upon you, your wedding-dress rent. I ask you, Pauline, how did it happen? I am quite terrified!"

For one moment the girl looked into her face, then broke into the most pitiful of sobs.

"I—I met with an accident," she muttered incoherently. "Does anyone know of it? Tell me."

"No, not yet; but everyone will soon know. They all missed you, and I was sent in search of you. I happened to think of the dark stair-way, and that is how I found you. But tell me what has happened. Do not keep me in suspense, Pauline. I am terrified beyond words."

"Do not let anyone know about it," cried the girl, in a sort of frenzy. "Keep from the whole world where you found me, and how."

"There must be no mystery about it. Tell me, my child, all that has happened."

"Not now—another time," muttered the girl, incoherently.

"Why should there be any concealment!" said Mrs. Peters. "I have been a friend all my life long to you, Pauline. Why should you conceal anything from me now?"

"I dare not tell," sobbed the girl. "Do not ask me!"

Her reply mystified Mrs. Peters more than ever.

"In Heaven's name tell me all, Pauline!" she cried, trembling with excitement. "This is becoming unbearable."

But the girl hesitated.

"I cannot answer."

Mrs. Peters soon found that affairs were worse than she had imagined.

"Let me help you to dress, Pauline," she said, "to allay curiosity. You must appear before your wedding guests as though nothing had happened."

With winged feet she sped to Pauline's boudoir, and securing her travelling-dress she assisted her to put it on without calling the maid, urging her, if anything was wrong, to call upon her, for she, of all others, was best able to help her. But nothing could unseal Pauline's lips. Uttering no word she suffered Mrs. Peters to robe her in her rich travelling-dress.

Mrs. Peters made one last effort to gain the girl's confidence, but it was useless.

"Try to forget the occurrence," Pauline answered; "and—and if you love me never refer to it again. I—I am going out into the darkness and bitterness of death. I have need of all my courage and—words of cheer from you."

Mrs. Peters took the girl in her arms, folding her close to her motherly heart, just as she used to do when she was a little child, answering, gently,—

"Keep your secret, if you must, my dear; but always remember, if you want comfort, come to me. I feel sorely afraid for you. You have married to please yourself, no one has coerced you, and you must face the future bravely."

"I know it," moaned Pauline, wringing her

hands. "I have burned all my ships behind me—there is no turning back!"

Taking the girl's hand Mrs. Peters led her through the corridor to the blue-room, where the bride's maids awaited her.

Such shouts as rent the air when they beheld her!

"Pauline has stolen a march on us, girls," cried one of the bride's maids. "She has dressed herself for travelling"—and there were cries of "Oh's" and "Ah's!"—"that wasn't fair! All of us girls were waiting to see which would get a chance to put the finishing touch to the bride's costume, to see which would marry next!"

The excitement was so great that they did not notice how pale Pauline was. At that moment somebody cried out,—

"The time is up, the bride and groom must enter the carriage and be driven to the station."

Maurice Fairfax pushed his way through the crowd. His bride saw him coming. As he drew nearer to her it seemed as though the breath would leave her body. He reached her side, but she did not die.

"Come!" he said, without even touching her hand.

"Must I go with you?" she moaned, faintly.

"Certainly! What a question to ask," he returned, sharply. "A wife must go with her husband, of course!"

The words had been uttered in a low voice, but not so low but that Mrs. Peters, who was standing directly behind Pauline, heard it, and she felt intuitively that Maurice Fairfax had taken part in whatever had happened on the dark stair-way.

The guests followed the bridal couple out to the verandah, and saw them enter the coach. Shouts and blessings were cried out in a breath as the carriage whirled down the gravelled path between the rows of linden-trees. Not one of them standing there dreamed that the hapless young bride was calling out to Heaven that the greatest blessing would be to die then and there.

Maurice Fairfax gave her one scowling glance as he took his seat beside her, then he seemed to ignore her altogether.

At the station there was a dense crowd to see the young people off, among whom were many of the miners, who had been employed by her father for years, with their wives and little children.

More than one woman said in open surprise that the silver king's daughter, despite all her wealth, did not look like a happy bride.

And there were women, too, who did not fancy the dark-browed, handsome man who sat by her side, looking as if everything bored him, and angry at the people who had gathered there to wish him and his bride god-speed.

"Such customs are infamous!" he cried, irritably, loud enough for many of them to hear him. "The idea that a man can't step on a train without a whole pack of folks coming to see him off. These people ought to be arrested—made to live on bread and water for a week!"

They drew back, greatly pained and deeply affected, and many of the blessings that were on their lips were turned into curses against Maurice Fairfax, but their hearts warmed toward the old silver king's daughter, who wept when she beheld them, and waved her handkerchief to the old familiar faces until the train bore her out of sight.

"I hope you are satisfied," growled Fairfax.

Pauline answered him never a word, but turned her face toward the window.

"So that's your game, eh? You are going to play the sulks. Well, so be it. I suppose they are better than your reproaches. It depends upon yourself how you're treated. Now, listen and heed well the commands which I am to lay down for you."

CHAPTER XXIX.

PAULINE turned her cold, proud face to the man she had just married.

"I have married you," she said, "but I do not intend that there shall be even friendship between us, or the merest pretence of it. It is better to understand that at the outset."

"That is your opinion," he said; "now listen to mine. We are going away among my friends—among people who will criticise your every word and action. I want these people to gain the impression that we live like a pair of turtle doves."

"Impossible!" said Pauline, bitterly. "I detect you so that the very sight of your face fills me with a horror so great that it must be noticeable to the casual observer."

"It will be a pleasure for me to break your proud spirit," retorted Fairfax. "Why, I wouldn't have a horse that wasn't spirited. I will take some of these notions out of you. You have met your master when you met me."

With every moment that passed, to Pauline's amazement, he grew more boisterous. Suddenly it dawned upon her that Maurice Fairfax was under the influence of wine, and she alone with him going she knew not whither.

"I'll teach you to be haughty toward me!" he cried out, in a terrible laugh. "When the people who saw you to-day see you again five years hence, they will hardly know you."

"They shall never see me again," she answered. "I have gone out of their lives forever."

"That's where you make a mistake," declared Fairfax, with a hilarious laugh. "We shall remain away on what the people would be pleased to term our honeymoon, then we shall return to Castle Royal."

"Never!" cried Pauline. "You will kill me first!"

"I suppose you don't want to return on account of the young secretary whom you left behind, grieving his life out about you?" he returned, sneeringly.

"How dare you even mention the name of an honourable gentleman!" cried Pauline in a low vibrating voice.

"With the hope of having considerable amusement at your expense," he returned, with a hilarious laugh. "It is indeed a sweet thought to me to remember how I outwitted him—the gentlemanly secretary who aspired to the hand of the silver king's daughter."

Pauline rose to her feet.

"I shall not listen to you!" she cried. "If you utter another word, I shall go to another car."

"You will, eh? What would I be doing in the meantime?"

She did not reply, lest she should break down utterly, her heart was so full. It seemed to her that she must surely die then and there, the pain in her heart was so great.

A week later they were in England. During that time the man whom she had wedded, with so much bitter hatred in her heart, had become almost intolerable to Pauline.

Her one prayer to Heaven was that she might die and end it all, and she wondered that good as her maker was, He did not hear her.

"There will be a party of friends at the docks to meet us," Fairfax announced, briefly. "See that you do not let any one know that we are not on the best of terms."

That was the first intimation she had had that there was any one expecting them. She did not make any comment, much to his annoyance, and he was altogether uncertain as to how she received this intelligence. Nothing much mattered to the girl who had bartered her life to save her father's honour.

At the docks there were a number of talkative people.

Maurice Fairfax gave her another sharp glance. "Mind now," he said, "not a word about our differences to any one, or it will be the worse for you!"

Pauline answered never a word. The desperate look in her eyes deepened.

As soon as they landed a crowd of Fairfax's friends gathered about them. But there was something about each person from which Pauline intuitively shrank. Fairfax noticed it.

"Look pleasant—smile," he whispered, lowering his brows darkly. "They are already making remarks about your glumness, and I won't have it—do you hear?"

Pauline turned her death-white face away from

him, and her lips tightened. That was all the sign she gave that she heard him.

A reception in honour of Fairfax and his bride had been arranged to take place at the house of one of his friends, and when they arrived there they found the place crowded.

For the first time since the hour they had been wedded, Pauline turned and spoke voluntarily to her husband.

"You have not told me who it is that is giving this reception," she said. "Is this the home of your parents or relatives?"

"No," he answered, while a dull, red flush suffused his face. "My folks and I are not friendly. The young lady who is giving this affair—Miss Passmore—is an old friend of mine."

"Your relatives will be here!" queried Pauline.

"No. Haven't I just told you that we are not on speaking terms!" he replied, irritably. "My father and my step-mother will be none too well pleased to know that I am in England again. They don't even know that I am married. That will be a surprise that will open their eyes, I fancy."

Pauline subsided into silence, wondering more than ever what manner of man this was, whom his own folks found unendurable.

As soon as it was announced that the bride and groom had arrived, a great about school through the rooms into which they were ushered, much to Pauline's intense amusement.

"Do people in the best society in this city shout!" she asked in wonder.

"Pshaw! don't be prudish!" returned Fairfax, sharply. "They are only in good spirits—that's all. If the ladies are a little hilarious, don't appear to notice it. They have opened a good many cases of champagne here, in our honour, to-night. You've been brought up in a little village. You'll have to learn the way they do in towns."

At this moment a very red-faced young man approached them.

"My friend, Captain Burton, is coming to ask you to dance," remarked Fairfax.

"If he does, I shall certainly refuse," replied Pauline, noticing that his steps were not quite steady, that his face was greatly flushed, and that his eyes looked very glassy.

"The deuce you will!" returned Fairfax, coarsely. "Burton would never forgive anything of that kind. He's not a man to offend."

"Surely I have the right of dancing or refusing a man whom I dislike at sight," said Pauline, erecting her head proudly.

"None of that, my Lady," muttered Fairfax, with a brutal imprecation. "My friends must be your friends."

"Not if that man is a sample of them," returned Pauline.

By this time Captain Burton had reached their side.

Fairfax introduced him to Pauline with an elaborate little speech, and, he as had surmised, the captain immediately asked her for the next waltz.

"I shall not dance," said Pauline. "Kindly excuse me. I feel a little tired after our long journey."

"Nonsense; that is the only way to shake off fatigue."

"You will please excuse me," said Pauline, almost stifled by the odour of his breath.

"I always dance with the bride; but it isn't very often that I get the opportunity of waltzing with such a pretty girl as yourself, eh!" turning to Fairfax, with a broad leer, as he spoke.

Pauline was more disgusted with the man than ever. The odour of his breath fairly staggered her, making her feel faint and dizzy.

"Of course she will dance with you," declared Fairfax, tightening his hold on her arm until Pauline almost cried out with the pain of it.

"She was admiring you a moment ago as you came across the room."

"I feel greatly flattered," declared Captain Burton, his bold eyes resting with admiration on the beautiful flower-like face.

Pauline could not find words in which to answer him.

"That is the 'Merry Wives of Windsor' waltz. Will you favour me with that dance?"

Pauline's whole soul rose up in rebellion. She felt that it would almost kill her to dance with this man; but with the whispered words of her husband ringing in her ears, "Don't dare be obstinate and make a scene," she dared not refuse his request. The next instant she found herself whirling away to the mad music of the waltz, with this stranger's arms crushed tightly about her, his wine-laden breath sweeping her face. Almost before she was aware of it, he had whirled her out on the balcony and slammed the window down after him.

"Why, you dance like a scorpion, my dear Mrs. Fairfax!" he cried. "Upon my word, Maurice is to be envied. I wish I was in his place."

Pauline did not attempt to keep up the conversation with him.

"By Jove! I shall tell Maurice on the first occasion that presents itself what a lucky fellow he was to choose you instead of our pretty hostess. She's just dying with envy ever since she first set eyes on you to-night."

"I don't know what you mean," said Pauline haughtily.

"Why, hasn't Fairfax told you all about it?" asked the captain, in amazement.

"I can do no more than repeat that I have not the slightest idea of what you refer to," returned Pauline, impatiently.

"Well, well! Ha! ha! ha! It's almost too good to keep. If you'll promise to be mum in regard to it—I mean by that that you won't give the snap away—I'll tell you the secret. I thought you knew all about it. But Maurice is such a sly fellow that one can never tell what he does or what he intends to do. You see, not very long since he and our hostess—the charming little Passmore—were fast friends; to be more explicit, he was 'dead gone on her,' as we men about town put it."

"Well, she threw him over for a fellow who has money to burn. They say that Maurice took it quite hard at first; but the next intelligence that came to us was a letter from him that stated he was married, and to a little beauty who could beat little Passmore all hollow as far as looks went. He was willing to wager a diamond scarf-pin on that, and leave it for us club-fellows to decide. The minute we read that letter, a dozen of us jumped to our feet, crying: 'We'll take him up on that, boys!' Within a week's time it was settled. We knew that you were coming to England, and we decided at this reception to determine the matter, where you both can have fair play."

"Do you mean to say that I—I—am made the subject of a wager?" cried Pauline, facing the man and trembling like a leaf.

"That's about the way of it," he answered, not noticing, in his hilarious mood, how very indignant she was. "I'm to be one of the judges," went on the captain, "and I assure you that I will award you the palm. The little blonde is so fair and you're so dark, that there's really no comparison between you. 'Pon my word, I'll yield you the palm, though there's a good deal of discussion on that point—they're all so much in love with little Passmore, Maurice's old sweetheart."

Pauline could not bear to hear more. Her pride, her womanhood, were insulted. How dare Maurice Fairfax bring her here to be the subject of discussion? Like a whirlwind she turned and entered the ball-room, and mingled with the revellers.

CHAPTER XXX.

CAPTAIN BURTON was quite startled over the terrible anger which his words seemed to produce.

"Bless my life, she's a regular little spit-fire!" he thought. "I didn't know that she'd make a scene over a little matter like that, or I wouldn't have told her. There will be the deuce and all to pay, I'm afraid. Well, it serves me right for not knowing enough to keep my tongue still. One never knows how to take these women, that's the worst of it. It will never do for her to return alone to the ball-room, that's certain."

With a greatly perturbed face, he hurried after her.

"I hope you will not let on that you know about it!" exclaimed the captain, hurrying after Pauline. "If you do, you will get me into a deuce of a scrape. I told you in confidence, you know—upon my word, I did. My old friend Maurice would never pardon me. I could wager anything on that."

The crowd was so great that she was glad to accept his arm.

"Take me—to—to—Mr. Fairfax at once," she said, commandingly.

"I shall be only too delighted," he declared. But Maurice Fairfax was not to be seen.

"If you like, I will go in search of him," said the captain, only too anxious to appease her.

"I should be very grateful to you if you would," she answered.

He led her to a seat in an alcove almost hidden away from the dancers by banks of roses.

"I think I know where to look for him," he added, attempting to joke with the haughty beauty. "Wherever the champagne is to be found, Fairfax won't be likely to be far off."

Pauline made no reply, and the captain went hurriedly away, leaving her to her own reflections, which were certainly anything but pleasant ones. It seemed to Pauline that she must fly from the place. She had married a man whom she abhorred, and every moment was a torture to her.

Through the screening roses she saw two young women approaching the place where she sat. They threw themselves down into a couple of camp chairs just on the other side of a bank of roses, so near that she could have put out her hand and touched them, so near that she could not help but hear every word that they uttered.

Their appearance, as they approached their seats, did not inspire her with either admiration or respect. Their ball-gowns were cut too low at the neck, and their faces certainly appeared as though they were painted.

"Well, what do you think of the gathering?" asked one. "Nellie Passmore has certainly brought out all her forces, that they may witness her triumph over Fairfax's bride. She wagered the magnificent diamond ring she wore that she could take Fairfax away from his bride, no matter how beautiful she is, and I do not see but that she is keeping her word. Wasn't he engaged to our jolly hostess at one time?" asked the girl. "It seemed to me that I heard some such report."

"Engaged!" laughed her companion. "Why,

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Nellie's a free lance; she wouldn't marry any one, even though he were fool enough to want her. Why, there's a dozen or two young fellows who have squandered their fortunes on Nellie, and when they haven't any more to spend on her, she sends them adrift. She always has plenty of lovers left, but they're not all as infatuated with her as Maurice Fairfax was, and is now, for that matter. Why, have you never heard the story about him?"

"No," said the other; "tell it to me. I delight in a little bit of gossip now and then."

"What woman doesn't!" laughed her companion. "But to make a long story short, Fairfax's infatuation for her was the talk of the town. His father was a banker, and had money to burn. As Maurice was an only son he had no lack of money at his command. He met Nellie one day at the races. He won two thousand pounds on one of his horses."

"When she said laughingly that she would give the world to own the horse, to the utter amazement of the crowd of friends who were about him, he presented her the animal on the spot, together with his winnings that day. That was the beginning of the affair; then he presented the beautiful Nellie Passmore with a brown-stone house on one of the finest avenues, horses and carriages, and diamonds that were worth a king's ransom, and everybody began to talk."

"It soon reached the old gentleman's ears, and a stormy scene ensued, in which father and son almost came to blows."

"The upshot of the matter was, the young man was sent adrift to do for himself. He went from bad to worse. In a short time he became known as one of the worst going."

"Nellie helped him to run through the money his father portioned him off with. But whenever he was left stranded she threw him over."

"It was a great blow to him, for he was head over heels in love with her. He went out to the backwoods of America somewhere, and the next that we heard of him was that he was married. Nellie Passmore was the only one who would not believe it."

"This newspaper paragraph said he was married on the twentieth, another said that he had just started on his honeymoon. But two days later he sent Nellie a magnificent diamond bracelet. That does not look much as if he had forgotten her, or that he was over much in love with his bride."

"That's how the wager came about—to bring the two face to face, and to determine which of the two was the prettier and which he cared the most for."

"It did not take long to decide that, for the moment Fairfax's eyes rested upon Nellie he seemed more desperately in love with her than ever."

"The haughty bride will not hold her head so high when she finds out why this reception is given to-night."

"It seemed to Pauline that the breath was leaving her body as she listened—the odour of the roses seemed to stifle her."

"Oh, why had she come here? Why had she listened and believed even so much as a word that Maurice Fairfax had uttered?"

The two women whose conversation she had overheard, were joined by two gentlemen, who asked them to dance, and they moved out upon the floor with laughing replies.

"Now is my time," thought Pauline. "I will fly from this house out in to the street—anywhere!"

She was just about to put her plan into execution, when she saw Maurice Fairfax enter through the very arched doorway through which she must pass, and leaning on his arm was the little blonde, dressed in white lace and gleaming with diamonds, whom he had introduced to her as their hostess.

No love filled her heart for Maurice Fairfax; but it cut her to the quick to see how he was disgracing her before these strange people, who had banded together to see her defeat and the other's triumph.

She saw him bend over his companion with flushed face and bright eyes, and lead her to the head of a set which was just forming.

She watched the dance through to the end; she heard the murmurs of the people in the seat near to her.

She saw the man she had wedded dance again and again with the beautiful, bewitching blonde. Evidently he had forgotten her very presence there. But the rest of the guests had not. There were whispered remarks in all parts of the room regarding her absence, and she heard more than one say,—

"Nellie Passmore's triumph is complete. The bride has gone off to one of the boudoirs to sulk. Ha! ha! ha!"

Pauline sank back in her seat, and she thought of the words she had read somewhere,—

"Is it sinful in life no joy to take—
To feel like a captive bound to the stake
By a chain that galls us, and will not break?
Is it sinful to gaze on the morning's sun
And wish that the gates of the West it had won,
That life's day was over, and its labours done?
Some fear to die; 'tis not so with me;
Rather, oh, Death, I pine for thee,
And long in the peaceful grave to be!"

And in that hour of utter weariness and deepest humiliation and heartache her thoughts turned to Denis Connor, the young secretary, who had loved her so well.

She stretched out her arms; but no one heard the bitter cry from the white lips of the young girl the roses hid from view.

Should she go out and confront Maurice Fairfax, the man who was making her the laughing-stock of all the people gathered there? Should she stand before him in her outraged pride, demanding to be taken away? Or should she fly from the house unseen—fly anywhere, to the very ends of the earth, to escape this man whom she abhorred?

"May Heaven give me strength to know which to do!" she cried, wringing her hands, the salt, bitter tears falling like rain down her face. "I—I—cannot endure it!"

The music played faster and faster to the mad, merry whirl of the dancers. Would it never cease! It would drown her voice if she cried out to Maurice Fairfax.

She could not thread her way through the throng of dancers to where Maurice Fairfax was dancing with her rival. What should she do? She felt as though she were dying. A wave of cool air swept across her face. She did not realize that she was near a window.

With eyes so blinded by tears that she could not see, she groped her way to it, drew aside the heavy draperies, and leaned out into the cool, soft air of the night.

"Heaven send me death!" she wailed.

But death did not come to her from the starlit sky, or from the winds that wailed and sobbed through the leafy trees.

"It is the punishment that has come to me for marrying a man (whom I abhor!)" she cried out.

But it had not been her fault; she was more to be pitied than accused.

A sudden temptation came to her to leap from the window down into the darkness below, the bottom of which her eyes could not penetrate. Her marriage for duty had been a terrible mistake.

She knew that she had caused Denis Connor to suffer, and he had said then, "If a heart-pang ever comes to you such as I am enduring now, then perhaps you will remember me."

Ah! did she not remember him in this hour, and cry out for him as only a breaking heart can cry out in the bitterness of its anguish!

She was startled by hearing someone call her name. Turning, she found herself face to face with Captain Burton.

"I hope the time does not seem long to you," he remarked; "but I have not had a chance to get a word with Maurice. He has just led his partner to her seat. Shall I take you across the room to him?"

"No," said Pauline, "I will go myself. I will denounce him for his cruel deception. He has grieved me beyond endurance, and now let the people who came here to witness my downfall see what will come of it!"

(To be continued.)

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FACETIE.

DAY: "I dislike to borrow books of Dawson."
JAY: "Why?" DAY: "He has such a good memory."

MISTRESS: "Bridget, I told you to get ham for luncheon, and you got steak." Bridget: "Shure, Oi niver eat ham!"

SHE: "A woman marries a man to keep him indoors." He: "And a man marries a woman to keep him in hate."

SINGLETON: "So you can't come, Jack! But a woman's 'no' often means 'yes.'" Mrs. Henpeck: "Not after marriage, sir—never!"

IRATE PEDESTRIAN (to scorchers): "Hi, there! have pedestrians no rights in this city!" Scorchers (whizzing by): "Certainly they have—funeral rites."

HUNGRY HENRY (the tramp): "Wot do you think of this here idea of eight hours' work?" Weary Willie: "It suits me all right; I worked my eight hours when I was a boy."

PROFESSOR: "Margaret, please take the cat out of the room. I cannot have it making such a noise while I am at work. Where is it?" "Why, sir, you are sitting on it."

A WIDOW at the West, intending to succeed her husband in the management of a hotel, advertises that "the hotel will be kept by the widow of the former landlord, Mr. Brown, who died last summer on a new and improved plan."

"Won't you take this seat?" said a gentleman in the car, rising and lifting his hat. "No, thank you," said the girl with the skates over her arm. "I've been skating, and I'm tired of sitting down."

MRS. AYNOD: "Bridget, the parlour windows are so dirty I can't see through them." Bridget: "Wall, mum, I only just came from the front door, and beyant the faces of Miss Fashion and her young man in the bay-window opposite, thur's nothin' across the way wort loking at."

DORSON: "Your son, I hear, is becoming an excellent landscape painter." Daubley: "He is." "Does he imitate nature well?" "Imitate nature! He beats nature. He can put colours into the landscape that nature never dreamed of."

DEALER: "Dogs! Yes, we have all the finest breeds, sir, any number of price—" Customer: "Oh, I don't want any of the costly, ultra-fashionable breeds. I want a common dog, a regular street cur, something that will be a nuisance to the neighbours." Dealer: "Um—well, they'll all be that."

TIRED TIM (the tramp): "I say, mister, can yer help a pore man what's just returned from fighting for the Greeks?" Benevolent Person: "Aren't you the same man that stopped me yesterday as a sufferer from the engineers' strike?" Tired Tim: "Yes, sir. I'm havin' an awful run o' hard luck."

In 1950.—"I say, pa," inquired little Johnny Wheeler, "what is a pedestrian?" "A pedestrian!" repeated Mr. Wheeler, scratching his head in a thoughtful manner. "Pe-des-tri-an," he mused. "Let me see! Oh, yes, of course. Why, that is what they used to call people when they walked."

"Did I understand you to say that you didn't have any company in the kitchen while I was out, Katie?" "Yes, mum; that's what I said." "But I smell the tobacco from a pipe all through the house." "Yes, mum; the policeman was in for half-an-hour, mum; but we were in the parlour."

The following is a story told of a doctor at one of the London hospitals: "He was one day lecturing to a class of medical students, when he stopped and asked a question which for some time none of them answered. But one man, who had never answered a question before, and was looked upon as the fool of the class, answered him correctly. The doctor was astonished, and stared at the man in amazement. 'You looked surprised, sir,' said the student. 'So did Balaam!' was the doctor's sharp reply."

HARKINS: "The lord bishop of Niagara says that young men ought to go to church on Sunday mornings and ride their bicycles into the country on Sunday afternoons. I think he's right, don't you?" Hunker: "Yes, he right, with the possible exception of going to church."

"The bicycle is a great moral factor," exclaimed the enthusiastic Mr. Sprockett. "It keeps women from gossiping about their neighbours." "Pooh!" was Mr. Teaser's interruption. "From my observation, it helps them to run people down more than ever."



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To purchasers sending in, before the end of November, most correct solutions to the following Puzzle Words:—

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| 3. LCGYREAMN. | 6. PPHHOOTREAG. |

DIRECTIONS.—Rearrange the words in order to represent six well-known trades and professions (for example, "PCEETRRAN" which represents "Carpenter"). Copy those you find out on a sheet of paper, placing the respective number to each, and post it, together with your order for the "YIOGRAPH," and P.O. for 1s. 6d., or 18 stamps, and stamped addressed reply envelope for result, &c., to

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Orders from those taking part in the contest should be sent in as early as possible, but not later than TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 30th. The Awards will be made, the Prize Money despatched, and the result communicated to all Competitors on Wednesday, December 1st.

The "YIOGRAPH" will be sent to purchasers per return, together with a notice informing Competitors how many of their solutions are correct.

This offer is genuine, and open to all, and as a further guarantee, we invite any purchaser to call and see the Prize Distribution fairly conducted.

SOCIETY.

A SECRET cipher code is used by the Queen in her private telegrams.

THE distinction of honorary doctor has been conferred upon Carmen Sylva by the Budapest University.

PRINCESS CHARLES OF DENMARK will reside for the next three months at Appleton Hall, when she is once again said to be under sentence of exile to Copenhagen.

ALL the members of the Royal Family have a great fancy for designing jewellery, and, as a rule, design all the presents they give to each other.

THE Empress Frederick is to reside at her palace on Uster den Lunden from the middle of November until the middle of January, when she is coming to England for some weeks on a visit to the Queen.

THE German Emperor has a new fad. When he is in the hunting field he is followed by a telephone carriage, by the use of which he can communicate with other points in the chase, learning from the foresters and gamekeepers the position of the deer and other game.

THE Queen is in the habit of keeping rooms which have been occupied by deceased relatives and friends locked up. The apartments at Clarence in which the Princess Charlotte died more than seventy years ago are closed, and nobody is allowed to use them. Prince Albert's apartments at Windsor are also closed. John Brown's rooms have been shut up since his death, and marked with a large brass sign, with an inscription commemorating his virtues and deploring his loss.

THE Princess of Wales has been using every inducement to persuade her sister, the Dowager Empress of Russia, to stay with her at Sandringham next month. It is some years since she was here, and the Queen is very anxious to see her in this country again. It is said. In all probability she will arrive about November 9th, when the Prince and Princess of Wales will be at Marlborough House, and she will then accompany them to Norfolk, where all the Prince's family will be gathered together.

THE German Emperor has announced his intention of spending next Easter at Jerusalem with the Empress, and has already given orders to the Berlin Department of the Navy to hold in readiness his yacht, the *Hohenzollern*, and the dispatch boat *Geffion* for the trip. He proposes to take advantage of his presence in the Holy City to preside over the ceremony of consecration of a new Lutheran church, built on a site given by the Sultan to the late Emperor Frederick while he was still Crown Prince, on the occasion of his visit to the Holy Land. The church in question is erected on the foundations of an ancient edifice of the same character dating from the Crusades. The Imperial couple, after spending Holy and Easter weeks at Jerusalem, will visit the tombs of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at Hebron, over which a mosque has been erected. No Christian or Hebrew has ever been permitted to cross the threshold of this mosque or to view these tombs, with the solitary exception of the Prince of Wales when he visited the Holy Land, while still a young man, in the company of Dean Stanley. After leaving Jerusalem the Kaiser and his consort propose to journey overland, via Mount Sinai, to Egypt, in response to an invitation from the Khedive.

IT is noticeable that among the reigning houses of Europe very few of them have any birth connection with the nation over which they preside. The King of Greece is not a Greek, the young King of Spain is not a Spaniard, the Prince of Bulgaria is not a Bulgarian, the Czar is very little of a Russian, and even our own Queen has scarcely a drop of English blood in her veins. Speaking roughly, the Royal Families of Europe are in the main German, with a dash of Danish, Dutch, Russian, and English. And the intermarriage which is now the rule between Royal houses is slowly producing a composite stock which is not Teutonic, Slavonic, Scandinavian or Anglo-Saxon, but a mixture of all.

STATISTICS.

THE various countries of the world now use 13,400 different kinds of postage-stamps.

THE average weight of the brain of the despised Chinaman is larger than that of any other race on the globe except the Scotch.

THE total revenue of the charitable institutions having their headquarters in London amounted last year to over six millions sterling.

THERE are 256 railway stations within a six-mile radius of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, while within a twelve-mile radius there are nearly 400.

A PLAYER at whist may hold about 635,000,000,000 different hands. Playing 49 deals every evening in the year, it might be above 40,000,000 years before a succession of players would have the same hand again.

GEMS.

THE soul suffering from the oppression of injustice recovers its lost elasticity by the performance of its duties, and in persevering occupation.

HUMILITY leads to the highest distinction, because it leads to self-improvement. Study your own characters; endeavour to learn and to supply your own deficiencies; never assume to yourself qualities which you do not possess; combine all this with energy and activity and you cannot predicate of yourselves, nor can others predicate of you, at what point you may arrive at last.

WHATEVER may be the elements of external beauty, there are certain well-defined features in the power of seeing and appreciating it. Perhaps the most essential of all is simplicity. Until a man honestly accepts his own real taste and sincerely avows it, he has no foundation upon which to build a better. It may be crude, it may be faulty, it may differ from that of everyone else; but, if it is truly his own, it is worth more to him, for the time being, than the very finest and best he can borrow. Not that he should esteem it the best because it is his; on the contrary, the humbler the opinion he holds of it, the more likely he will be to develop it; but it is the elemental germ without which there can be no cultivation.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

TAPIoca ICE.—One cup of tapioca soaked over night. In the morning put it on the stove and when boiling hot add one cup of sugar and boil till clear; chop one pineapple, pour the tapioca over it, stir together and pour into moulds. When cold serve with sugar and cream.

SAVOURY PANCAKES.—Two eggs, two ounces of flour, half-pint of milk, quarter-teaspoonful lemon rind, small shalot, quarter-teaspoonful sweet herbs, quarter-teaspoonful salt, pinch pepper. Put in a basin all these things, except the eggs and milk, chop the shalot very finely, and then gradually add the eggs and milk, stirring till smooth. Put a small bit of butter in a small frying pan, pour in enough to cover the bottom of the pan, and fry on both sides; repeat till all are done. Serve hot.

DELICIOUS PEACH PUDDING.—Fill a pudding dish with whole peeled peaches, and pour over them two cups of water. Cover closely and bake until the peaches are tender, then drain off the juice from the peaches, and let it stand to cool. Add to the juice one pint sweet milk, four well-beaten eggs, a small cup of flour, with one teaspoonful of baking powder mixed in it, one cup sugar, one tablespoonful melted butter and a little salt. Beat well three or four minutes and pour over peaches in the dish. Bake until a rich brown and serve with cream.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THERE is only one sudden death among women to eight among men.

A HEAVY London fog will cost for artificial light between £7,000 and £8,000.

IT is estimated that the annual dewfall of Great Britain is equal to 22,161,937,855 tons.

IN proportion to its size Britain has eight times as many miles of railway as the United States.

THE Chinese shake their own hands instead of the hands of those they greet. The men wear shirts and the women trousers.

A REMARKABLE tree grows in Brazil. It is about six feet high, and is so luminous that it can be seen on the darkest night for a distance of a mile or more.

PERFUMES, according to the latest authority, should never be mixed. To be correct, one must select one particular odour, and have all one's belongings impregnated with it.

SEVERAL headaches may be removed by spirits of ammonia. It should be carefully used, as the constant use of salts, ammonia, and other strong scents injures and inflames the nose.

A BATTERY has been patented consisting of a source of electrical energy placed inside a cake of toilet soap. The device is reputed to be intended for curative applications of electricity to the human body.

THE water of the River Tinto, in Spain, hardens and petrifies the sand of its bed, and if a stone falls in the stream, and alights upon another, in a few months they unite and become one stone. Fish cannot live in its waters.

NOTHING more astonishing has marked the extent of the Queen's reign than the increased speed of sea travelling. Within the last fifty years the rate of speed of ocean steamers has trebled, and the usual horse-power increased from 700 to 10,000.

PERHAPS the most curious occupation conceived by a woman is that of dinner-taster. She spends a part of each day visiting houses and tasting dishes intended for dinner. She suggests improvements, and shows the cook new ways of preparing dishes.

MANY old houses in Holland have a special door, which is never open save on two occasions—when there is a marriage or a death in the family. The bride and groom enter by this door. It is then nailed or barred up until a death occurs, when it is opened and the body is removed by this exit.

A TABLESPOONFUL of powdered alum sprinkled into a hoghead of water will so purify it that after a few hours it will be found to possess nearly all the clearness and freshness of the finest spring water, the impure particles sinking to the bottom. One teaspoonful will purify four gallons.

NEW GUINEA is the home of the most wonderful feathered creature known to the student of ornithology—the awful raptor n'doob, or "bird of death." A wound from the beak of this creature causes excruciating pains in every part of the body, loss of sight, speech, and hearing, convulsions, lockjaw, and certain death.

A MOST ingenious system is employed by which the director of the Suez Canal can tell at a glance the exact position of all vessels passing through it. A model is placed in the office at Port Said, and the whole canal is worked from headquarters by means of the telegraph, the position of each ship being marked by a figure on the model. It is thus made easy to arrange for vessels passing each other.

ONE of the best weather prophets is the spider. If there happens to be a web in the secluded corner of the porch, watch it carefully for a few days or weeks, and the spider will unfailingly predict the coming of storms. When the spider sits quiet and dull in the middle of its web, rain is not far off. If it be active, however, and continues so during a shower, then it will be of brief duration, and sunshine will follow.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

J. D.—Try at Somerset House.
HEATHA.—There is no difference.
LOLL.—Inquire at Inland Revenue Office.
HONOUR.—An IOU is only evidence of debt.
THRETS.—Tay Bridge fell on December 28th, 1879.
M. E. B.—Any medical bookseller would supply you.
MONICA.—The name is pronounced to rhyme with penny.
IN DESPAIR.—We are afraid you can do nothing further.
MARION.—A special marriage license usually costs about 250.
FLYAWAY.—Consult your bookseller; there are dozens equally good.
LEGATE.—If you take your sister's estate, you must pay her debts.
ROSE.—There are several varieties of roses suitable for the purpose.
UNDER AGE.—Both sexes attain their majority at the age of twenty-one.
HEVEN or TROY.—A cubic foot of pure gold weighs about 1,205 pounds.
MISER.—No one who is under the age of twenty-one can make a legal will.
A SUPERBULOUS WOMAN.—Women are in a minority in most of our colonies.
LOVA.—The "harvest moon" is the full moon nearest to the autumnal equinox.
BROKEN HEARTED.—Unless the engagement was in writing you cannot enforce it.
ALMA.—Miss Florence Nightingale, the famous nurse, is still alive and 77 years of age.
LONDON.—A notice for next Lady-day may be given any time before Michaelmas-day.
IN NEED OF HELP.—If you know of some thoroughly reliable lawyer certainly go to him.
R. G. A.—It depends entirely upon the qualifications insisted upon by the school authorities.
EROLIMMAS.—The word "inri" used in connection with Hindu or Mahabala warriors signifies a regiment.
TRIBULATION.—We should think there is scarcely any limit to the things that may be taught to a blind man.
WORRIED MOTHER.—If a child has passed the fourth standard, he may leave school when thirteen years of age.
ONE IN TROUBLE.—A man cannot be made to pay money lent to his wife without his knowledge or authority.
IGNORANCE.—The Gold Coast extends for about 250 miles along the coast, south of Ashante in Western Africa.
GODIVA.—Paraffin is said to be efficacious for the purpose; it should be rubbed into the roots just before going to rest.
SABOT.—You must not fail to attend the Court, otherwise decree will be given against you in absence for the full sum claimed.
MABELLE.—We should advise your using nothing but a gentle rubbing over with milk, followed by rubbing with a very soft, dry cloth.
YOUNG AND FOOLISH.—There are so many pamphlets and books upon the question that we think you would do better to read up from such sources. It is too mighty a question for us to wrestle with here.
YOUNG WIFE.—It is generally better, in the long run, to send them to the laundry, as no one but a professional can attain the desired stiffness and polish; the cost is comparatively small and the work hard at the best.

IGNORANT OF LAW.—If there was no will, the widow would have one-third and the children the remaining two-thirds equally between them.

CONSTANT READER.—Your 11d. piece in silver is of no value; it is what is called Maundy money, coined every year for use of the English Church.

CURIOS.—The largest cemetery in the world is perhaps one of the catacombs of Rome, where six millions of human beings have been interred.

OLD SOLDIER.—On proof of your intention to emigrate, your pension can be commuted for four years' purchase on application to the Commissioners at Chelsea.

X.—He is not entitled over to have it in his keeping except he can show that the parties having charge of it are not fit guardians, or are abusing the little thing.

S. P. G.—Fat will not burn if it has something to do; so if it has to be left idle for a few minutes, put a crust of bread or a slice of raw potato into the frying-pan.

HEIKER.—To cool a hot room, wet thoroughly a large sheet and hang it up in the middle. The temperature will go down ten or twelve degrees almost immediately.

FORBIDDEN.

If love were other than a perfect thing,
 Love were no gain, but only all a grief,
 And better were to choke its blossoming
 Ere one poor bud could struggle into leaf;
 To all it is in the spring.

If love were other than a perfect thing.

If love were other than most sweet of all,
 Love were the bitterest gift of bitter fate,
 And better were to spurn beyond recall
 Its magic ope more perils than hate.
 Its sweetness were but gall,
 If love were other than most sweet of all.

If love were other than the love of you,
 Love were a poverty, and nothing worth,
 And all the tasks that memory had to do
 Would be to loathe the hour that gave it birth.
 Love were not sweet nor true
 If love were other than the love of you.

But love is love, and you are you, and I
 Am I that dare to love you with a will,
 Knowing that love is perfect, true and high,
 And always greater than its greatest ill;
 Knowing it cannot die,
 Since love is love of you, and I am I.

VERY TROUBLED.—Do not disfigure the hands with caustic to remove warts, but touch them with strong soda-water several times a day. They will disappear.

MELANCHOLY.—You should range more in society, and take plenty of exercise and fresh air. If you do this the morbid condition of your mind will rapidly disappear.

PATE.—If you have possession of the policies upon which you are paying the premiums into the society, the officials are by law authorised to pay the money to you as being the person in their opinion legally entitled to receive it.

PADDY.—A man born of Irish parents is an Irishman, no matter where his birth may take place; he is, however, native of the country where born, but that is more geographical distinction; it has nothing to do with blood relationship at all.

NATURALIST.—Probably the very best way is to begin on a small scale and go carefully about the study of the habits and peculiarities of the birds. One thing seems to be admitted by all, and that is that they must never get wet or be exposed to storms.

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ENQUETE.—The head of the house in which the marriage is to take place invites persons to come there as his guests to assist in celebrating the wedding of the persons named in the invitations; the card will therefore run thus—"Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so request the favour of the company of Mr. (or Miss) Such-an-one on such a date and hour at the marriage of their niece, So-and-so, to Mr. Such-a-body;" date is appended, and R.S.V.P. is usually added, meaning that reply is desired.

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BLACK EYE.—Captain Boycott was an Irish farmer occupying a farm near Lough Mask, Ballinrobe, Ireland, who declined to submit to the demands of the Land League, and was in consequence "put in Coventry" by his neighbours, as the phrase goes; labourers refused to reap his crops; tradesmen declined to supply him with provisions; in brief, he was subjected to a regular siege, but he remained undaunted; obtained food through the agency of the Royal Irish Constabulary, got labourers from distant parts of the country, and in spite of all opposition secured his harvest and defied the League; in the end his pluck won him the esteem even of those who had been opposed to him in the years of strife, so that previous to his death which occurred not long ago, he was one of the most popular men in his country.

YOUNG COOK.—Properly roasted, a fresh beef or calf's tongue is a delicious meat, of good flavour and of great tenderness. Select a tongue weighing three pounds. Wash and trim it thoroughly and rub it with salt and pepper. Wrap a paste around it made of a pint of flour and an eggful of water. Roll out this paste thin, place it around the tongue. Lay it on a meat rack in a dripping pan, pour in a pint of boiling water. Roast it for two hours. Keep the surface of the paste from drying too hard, or from burning, by basting it with the boiling water in the bottom of the pan. At the end of this time remove the paste. It is of no further value. Loosen the skin of the tongue and peel it off. Lay it back in the pan and rub it over with butter, about one tablespoonful or more if necessary; dredge it lightly with flour, and pour a cupful of rich, brown stock in the pan under it to baste it with. Roast it, basting it often until it is well browned. Take it up, add a dean mushrooms, chopped fine, to the brown gravy in the pan, thicken it and serve it with the tongue.

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SOCIETY.

A SECRET cipher code is used by the Queen in her private telegrams.

THE distinction of honorary doctor has been conferred upon Carmen Sylva by the Budapest University.

PRINCESS CHARLES OF DENMARK will reside for the next three months at Appletton Hall, when she is once again said to be under sentence of exile to Copenhagen.

ALL the members of the Royal Family have a great fancy for designing jewellery, and, as a rule, design all the presents they give to each other.

THE Empress Frederick is to reside at her palace on Unter den Linden from the middle of November until the middle of January, when she is coming to England for some weeks on a visit to the Queen.

THE German Emperor has a new sad. When he is in the hunting field he is followed by a telephone carriage, by the use of which he can communicate with other points in the chase, learning from the foresters and gamekeepers the position of the deer and other game.

THE Queen is in the habit of keeping rooms which have been occupied by deceased relatives and friends locked up. The apartments at Claremont in which the Princess Charlotte died more than seventy years ago are closed, and nobody is allowed to use them. Prince Albert's apartments at Windsor are also closed. John Brown's rooms have been shut up since his death, and marked with a large brass sign, with an inscription commemorating his virtues and deploring his loss.

THE Princess of Wales has been using every inducement to persuade her sister, the Dowager Empress of Russia, to stay with her at Sandringham next month. It is some years since she was here, and the Queen is very anxious to see her in this country again. It is said. In all probability she will arrive about November 9th, when the Prince and Princess of Wales will be at Marlborough House, and she will then accompany them to Norfolk, where all the Prince's family will be gathered together.

THE German Emperor has announced his intention of spending next Easter at Jerusalem with the Empress, and has already given orders to the Berlin Department of the Navy to hold in readiness his yacht, the *Hohenzollern*, and the dispatch-boat *Geffion* for the trip. He proposes to take advantage of his presence in the Holy City to preside over the ceremony of consecration of a new Lutheran church, built on a site given by the Sultan to the late Emperor Frederick while he was still Crown Prince, on the occasion of his visit to the Holy Land. The church in question is erected on the foundations of an ancient edifice of the same character dating from the Crusades. The Imperial couple, after spending Holy and Easter weeks at Jerusalem, will visit the tombs of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at Hebron, over which a mosque has been erected. No Christian or Hebrew has ever been permitted to cross the threshold of this mosque or to view these tombs, with the solitary exception of the Prince of Wales when he visited the Holy Land, while still a young man, in the company of Dean Stanley. After leaving Jerusalem the Kaiser and his consort propose to journey overland, via Mount Sinai, to Egypt, in response to an invitation from the Khedive.

It is noticeable that among the reigning houses of Europe very few of them have any birth connection with the nation over which they preside. The King of Greece is not a Greek, the young King of Spain is not a Spaniard, the Prince of Bulgaria is not a Bulgarian, the Czar is very little of a Russian, and even our own Queen has scarcely a drop of English blood in her veins. Speaking roughly, the Royal Families of Europe are in the main German, with a dash of Danish, Dutch, Russian, and English. And the intermarriage which is now the rule between Royal houses is slowly producing a composite stock which is not Teutonic, Slavonic, Scandinavian or Anglo-Saxon, but a mixture of all.

STATISTICS.

THE various countries of the world now use 13,400 different kinds of postage-stamps.

THE average weight of the brain of the despised Chinaman is larger than that of any other race on the globe except the Scotch.

THE total revenue of the charitable institutions having their headquarters in London amounted last year to over six millions sterling.

THERE are 256 railway stations within a six-mile radius of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, while within a twelve-mile radius there are nearly 400.

A PLAYER at whist may hold about 635,000,000,000 different hands. Playing 49 deals every evening in the year, it might be above 40,000,000 years before a succession of players would have the same hand again.

GEMS.

THE soul suffering from the oppression of injustice recovers its lost elasticity by the performance of its duties, and in persevering occupation.

HUMILITY leads to the highest distinction, because it leads to self-improvement. Study your own characters; endeavour to learn and to supply your own deficiencies; never assume to yourself qualities which you do not possess; combine all this with energy and activity and you cannot predicate of yourselves, nor can others predicate of you, at what point you may arrive at last.

WHATEVER may be the elements of external beauty, there are certain well-defined features in the power of seeing and appreciating it. Perhaps the most essential of all is simplicity. Until a man honestly accepts his own real taste and sincerely avows it, he has no foundation upon which to build a better. It may be crude, it may be faulty, it may differ from that of everyone else; but, if it be truly his own, it is worth more to him, for the time being, than the very finest and best he can borrow. Not that he should esteem it the best because it is his; on the contrary, the humbler the opinion he holds of it, the more likely he will be to develop it; but it is the elemental germ without which there can be no cultivation.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

TAPIoca ICE.—One cup of tapioca soaked over night. In the morning put it on the stove and when boiling hot add one cup of sugar and boil till clear; chop one pineapple, pour the tapioca over it, stir together and pour into moulds. When cold serve with sugar and cream.

SAVOURY PANCAKES.—Two eggs, two ounces of flour, half-pint of milk, quarter-teaspoonful lemon rind, small shalot, quarter-teaspoonful sweet herbs, quarter-teaspoonful salt, pinch pepper. Put in a basin all these things, except the eggs and milk, chop the shalot very finely, and then gradually add the eggs and milk, stirring till smooth. Put a small bit of butter in a small frying pan, pour in enough to cover the bottom of the pan, and fry on both sides; repeat till all are done. Serve hot.

DELICIOUS PEACH PUDDING.—Fill a pudding dish with whole peeled peaches, and pour over them two cups of water. Cover closely and bake until the peaches are tender, then drain off the juice from the peaches, and let it stand to cool. Add to the juice one pint sweet milk, four well-beaten eggs, a small cup of flour, with one teaspoonful of baking powder mixed in it, one cup sugar, one tablespoonful melted butter and a little salt. Beat well three or four minutes and pour over peaches in the dish. Bake until a rich brown and serve with cream.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THERE is only one sudden death among women to eight among men.

A HEAVY London fog will cost for artificial light between £7,000 and £8,000.

It is estimated that the annual downfall of Great Britain is equal to 22,161,337,355 tons.

In proportion to its size Britain has eight times as many miles of railway as the United States.

THE Chinese shake their own hands instead of the hands of those they greet. The men wear skirts and the women trousers.

A REMARKABLE tree grows in Brazil. It is about six feet high, and is so luminous that it can be seen on the darkest night for a distance of a mile or more.

PERFUMES, according to the latest authority, should never be mixed. To be correct, one must select one particular odour, and have all one's belongings impregnated with it.

SEVERE headaches may be removed by spritzes of ammonia. It should be carefully used, as the constant use of salts, ammonia, and other strong scents injures and inflames the nose.

A BATTERY has been patented consisting of a source of electrical energy placed inside a cake of toilet soap. The device is reputed to be intended for curative applications of electricity to the human body.

THE water of the River Tinto, in Spain, hardens and petrifies the sand of its bed, and if a stone falls in the stream, and slights upon another, in a few months they unite and become one stone. Fish cannot live in its waters.

NOTHING more astonishing has marked the extent of the Queen's reign than the increased speed of sea travelling. Within the last fifty years the rate of speed of ocean steamers has trebled, and the usual horse power increased from 700 to 10,000.

PERHAPS the most curious occupation conceived by a woman is that of dinner-taster. She spends a part of each day visiting houses and testing dishes intended for dinner. She suggests improvements, and shows the cook new ways of preparing dishes.

MANY old houses in Holland have a special door, which is never open save on two occasions—when there is a marriage or a death in the family. The bride and groom enter by this door. It is then nailed or barred up until a death occurs, when it is opened and the body is removed by this exit.

A TABLESPOONFUL of powdered alum sprinkled into a hoghead of water will so purify it that after a few hours it will be found to possess nearly all the clearness and freshness of the finest spring water, the impure particles sinking to the bottom. One teaspoonful will purify four gallons.

NEW GUINEA is the home of the most wonderful feathered creature known to the student of ornithology—the awful rhip n'doob, or "bird of death." A wound from the beak of this creature causes excruciating pains in every part of the body, loss of sight, speech, and hearing, convulsions, lockjaw, and certain death.

A most ingenious system is employed by which the director of the Suez Canal can tell at a glance the exact position of all vessels passing through it. A model is placed in the office at Port Said, and the whole canal is worked from headquarters by means of the telegraph, the position of each ship being marked by a figure on the model. It is thus made easy to arrange for vessels passing each other.

ONE of the best weather prophets is the spider. If there happens to be a web in the secluded corner of the porch, watch it carefully for a few days or weeks, and the spider will unfailingly predict the coming of storms. When the spider sits quiet and dull in the middle of its web, rain is not far off. If it be active, however, and continues so during a shower, then it will be of brief duration, and sunshine will follow.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

J. D.—Try at Somerset House.
HARTEA.—There is no difference.
ESLA.—Inquire at Inland Revenue Office.
HONOUR.—An I O U is only evidence of debt.
THIRTA.—Tay Bridge fell on December 28th, 1879.
M. E. B.—Any medical bookseller would supply you.
MEXICA.—The name is pronounced to rhyme with penny.
IN DESPAIR.—We are afraid you can do nothing further.
MARION.—A special marriage license usually costs about £20.
FLYAWAY.—Consult your bookseller; there are dozens equally good.
LEGATES.—If you take your sister's estate, you must pay her debts.
ROSE.—There are several varieties of roses suitable for the purpose.
UNION AGE.—Both sexes attain their majority at the age of twenty-one.
HELEN OF TROY.—A cubit foot of pure gold weighs about 3.205 pounds.
MINOR.—No one who is under the age of twenty-one can make a legal will.
A REPERFECT WOMAN.—Women are in a minority in most of our colonies.
LOMA.—The "harvest moon" is the full moon nearest to the autumnal equinox.
BROOKER-MARTIN.—Unless the engagement was in writing you cannot enforce it.
ALMA.—Miss Florence Nightingale, the famous nurse, is still alive and 77 years of age.
LORENO.—A notice for next Lady-day may be given any time before Michaelmas-day.
IS NEED OF HELP.—If you know of some thoroughly reliable lawyer certainly go to him.
R. G. A.—It depends entirely upon the qualifications insisted upon by the school authorities.
ESQUERMAN.—The word "impt" used in connection with Gail or Mathele waiters signifies a regiment.
TRAMULATION.—We should think there is scarcely any limit to the things that may be taught to a blind man.
WORRIED MOTHER.—If a child has passed the fourth standard he may leave school when thirteen years of age.
ONE IN TROUBLE.—A man cannot be made to pay money lent to his wife without his knowledge or authority.
ISORAMOR.—The Gold Coast extends for about 250 miles along the coast, south of Ashantee in Western Africa.
GODIVA.—Paraffin is said to be efficacious for the purpose; it should be rubbed into the roots just before going to rest.
SANDE.—You must not fail to attend the Court, otherwise decree will be given against you in absence for the full sum claimed.
MARLEL.—We should advise your using nothing but a gentle rubbing over with milk, followed by rubbing with a very soft, dry cloth.
YOUNG AND FOOLISH.—There are so many pamphlets and books upon the question that we think you would do better to read up from such sources. It is too mighty a question for us to wrestle with here.
YOUNG WIFE.—It is generally better, in the long run, to send them to the laundry, as no one but a professional can attain the desired stiffness and polish; the cost is comparatively small and the work hard at the best.

IGNORANT OF LAW.—If there was no will, the widow would have one-third and the children the remaining two-thirds equally between them.

CONSTANT READER.—Your 11d. piece in silver is of no value; it is what is called Maundy money, coined every year for use of the English Church.

CURIOUS.—The largest cemetery in the world is perhaps one of the catacombs of Rome, where six millions of human beings have been interred.

OLD SOLDIER.—On proof of your intention to emigrate, your pension can be commuted for four years' purchase on application to the Commissioners at Quebec.

X.—He is not entitled ever to have it in his keeping except he can show that the parties having charge of it are not fit guardians, or are abusing the little thing.

R. P. G..—Fat will not burn if it has something to do; so if it has to be left idle for a few minutes, put a crust of bread or a slice of raw potato into the frying-pan.

HEWER.—To cool a hot room, wet thoroughly a large sheet and hang it up in the middle. The temperature will go down ten or twelve degrees almost immediately.

FORBIDDEN.

If love were other than a perfect thing,
 Love were no gain, but only all a grief,
 And better were to chuck its blossoming
 Ere one poor bud could struggle into leaf;
 To all it in the spring.

If love were other than a perfect thing.

If love were other than most sweet of all,
 Love were the bitterest gift of bitter fate,
 And better were to spurn beyond recall
 Its magic cup more perilous than hate.
 Its sweetness were but gall,
 If love were other than most sweet of all.

If love were other than the love of you,
 Love were a poverty, and nothing worth,
 And all the tasks that memory had to do
 Would be to loathe the hour that gave it birth.

Love were not sweet nor true
 If love were other than the love of you.

But love is love, and you are you, and I
 Am I that dare to love you with a will,
 Knowing that love is perfect, true and high,
 And always greater than its greatest ill:
 Knowing it cannot die,
 Since love is love of you, and I am I.

VERY TROUBLED.—Do not disfigure the hands with caustic to remove warts, but touch them with strong soda-water several times a day. They will disappear.

MELANCHOLY.—You should mingle more in society, and take plenty of exercise and fresh air. If you do this the morbid condition of your mind will rapidly disappear.

PETER.—If you have possession of the policies upon which you are paying the premiums into the society, the officials are by law authorised to pay the money to you as being the person in their opinion legally entitled to receive it.

PAINY.—A man born of Irish parents is an Irishman, no matter where his birth may take place; he is, however, native of the country where born, but that is more geographical distinction; it has nothing to do with blood relationship at all.

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LOTION

LIFEBUOY

Royal Disinfectant SOAP

A DOCTOR'S OPINION.

Twynford, Berks,
March 29th, 1895.

Dear Sirs,

We cannot overrate the value of cleanliness of person, that is of clothes and body. The bath, whether it be the daily cold tub, the evening warm bath, or the weekly Turkish, does far more than most people would believe. To avert sickness and maintain the body in health, such a soap as Lifebuoy Soap is beyond all praise. Its softness and purity must commend it to all.

Dr. GORDON STAPLES, R.N.

A NURSE'S OPINION.

5 Patahull Road,
Kentish Town, N.W.

Dear Sirs,

I think it right that you should know I used your Lifebuoy Royal Disinfectant Soap for patients' clothing and rooms, extensively throughout the late epidemic. I never travel without it, and have found it invaluable. The more I use it the better pleased I am.

L. POLLARD.

Late Nurse of the R.N.S. and other Hospitals.



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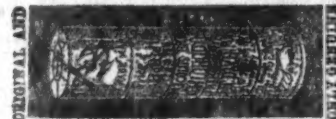
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DR. J. COLLIS BROWNE'S CHLORODYNE.—Vice-Chancellor Sir W. PAGE WOOD stated publicly in Court that Dr. J. COLLIS BROWNE was undoubtedly the INVENTOR of CHLORODYNE, that the whole story of the defendant Freeman was deliberately untrue, and he regretted to say it had been sworn to.—See The Times, July 13th, 1894.

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